

# FOSTER ROSTER

Utah's Foster Family Magazine

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CEO

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OPERATIONS

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EDUCATION

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RETENTION

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RECRUITMENT

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COMMUNICATIONS

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CARE COMMUNITIES

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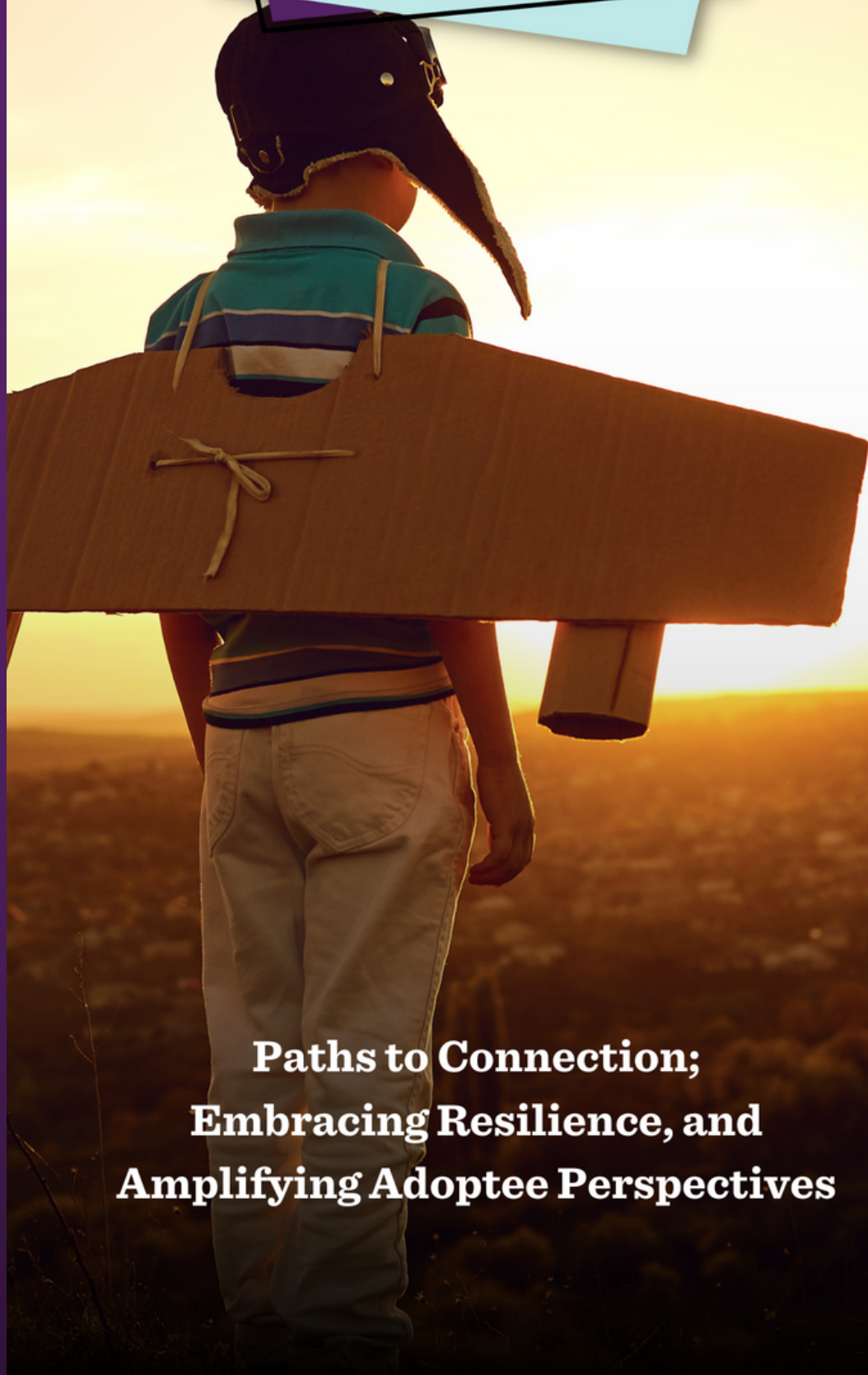
**Editor**  
DARCEY WISEMAN

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# UTAH FOSTER CARE Symposium

**Paths to Connection;  
Embracing Resilience, and  
Amplifying Adoptee Perspectives**



# SIBLING CONNECTIONS

*By Heidi Naylor, Director, Retention Services, UFC*



It is estimated that 85% of youth who enter into the Foster Care system do so with at least one sibling. The longer they remain in care, the more likely they will be separated. Maintaining family bonds makes them more resilient. It becomes a protective factor for their mental health.

Our son came to us at 11. He had been on the Adoption Exchange twice. That is where we first discovered him. He had been in foster care since he was 4 ½. We were his fourth adoptive placement. By the time he had made it to our home, he couldn't remember how many moves he had made. He lost something with each of those moves. He began to view everything as temporary, including family. When he first came into care, his oldest half-sister went with her birth father. He and his two remaining siblings entered the Christmas Box house. Family came and claimed his remaining sister. Leaving him and his brother to enter Foster Care. They moved and moved and moved together. Until it became clear that the trauma bond they shared was making it nearly impossible for either of them to heal. The hard decision was made to place them separately.

When we appeared, we knew he had three older siblings. However, we had no information where any of them were placed. Even after reviewing his file, we knew little. Siblings are the one set of people that you expect will always be with you. You will know them longer and better than anyone in your life. Although our son had siblings in our home, he mourned the loss of those who had been through so much with him. The ones that looked like him. The ones that shared his blood. We actively tried to find them. When my sister called, she mentioned that a girl lived six houses away from her. She said the girl was adopted and that she was positive that she was related to our son. We were unsure, as we had been told that both his sisters were with family. We sent her on a mission to discover more about the situation and get back to us.

A few days went by when she called again and asked us if we would call and talk to her adoptive Mom. I quickly called her. After only a few minutes on the phone, I realized we had indeed found his sister. She had entered foster care herself a few years earlier and had been moved from Salt Lake to less than 10 minutes away from us in Utah County.

We discovered finding our son had become a mission for his sister. No one knew where he was. We arranged for them to be surprised after school that day. All we told him was that we had an amazing surprise for him. We knocked on the door, and his sister opened it. There was no question she was his sister; they looked so much alike. They immediately embraced and began to cry. My son was shaking. He kept looking back at me, asking how. He knew we had tried everything we could think of. This was left in someone else's hands, and the pieces had fallen into place. To call this a miracle is almost minimizing how amazing it was that these siblings found their way back to one another. They sat for over a couple of hours sharing pictures and stories, vacillating from crying to laughing. They were almost too scared to end the visit if they lost each other again. Even more impressive is that his sister knew where the other two siblings were. We left that night with all his siblings' names, phone numbers, and addresses. And, of course, the promise of another visit. This was amazingly healing for our son. But it also turned into more children for us to love. His brother spent at least one weekend a month with us. He was able to attend both of his sister's weddings. He connected with his birth family, like his favorite Grandpa Herman, whom he missed dearly and was only with us for a few more years. A large part of him was healed by connecting with his family again. Siblings deserve the opportunity to be together or, at the very least, have contact if it is healthy and they cannot live together.

### Murray

5296 South Commerce Dr.  
Suite 400 Murray, UT 84107  
Main: 801-994-5205  
Fax: 801-994-5206  
Toll-Free: 877-505-5437

### Ogden

3340 South Harrison Blvd. Suite 110  
Ogden, UT 84403  
Main: 801-392-1114

### Orem

274 West Center Street  
Orem, UT 84057  
Main: 801-373-3006

### Price

475 West Price River Dr. Suite 152  
Price, UT 84501  
Main: 435-269-5978

### Vernal

1680 West Highway 40 Suite 100  
Vernal, UT 84078  
Main: 801-743-7336

### Moab

125 West 200 South Suite 121  
Moab, UT 84532  
Main: 801-514-7692

### St. George

230 North 1680 East W-113  
St. George, UT 84790  
Main: 385-758-3661

### Richfield

201 East 500 North  
Richfield, UT 84701  
Main: 435-979-2233

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MENTOR?



By Michelle Ostmark, Mentoring Specialist

A mentor is defined as “a trusted counselor or guide.” People we trust and can talk to when things are tough, sad, and confusing and those we want to share our accomplishments and joy with. It is the opportunity to make an impact on someone’s life.

Thinking back, who are the people who have impacted and influenced you the most in your life? Are they teachers, friends, parents, colleagues, or even your children? Think back to those who helped you in your past and those who help you currently; these people continue to show up even after the dust has settled.

These people continue to show up because they care; they want to teach and encourage us while offering support, love, and understanding. They are mentors.

Foster, adoptive, and kinship families have a unique role in the life of a child in care; just like their primary family, you are irreplaceable because of the work, sacrifice, and love you give to the children and families you serve.

Mentors are foster families who choose their role and the time they dedicate to helping other families starting the foster care journey or seasoned foster families needing additional support for a hard case. Mentors decide to help guide and support foster families beginning this journey by assisting them in navigating the entire system, listening, offering support and resources, and often becoming trusted friends, using their experience and ongoing training.

Becoming a foster parent takes a great deal of consideration, preparation, and patience when faced with uncertainty and multiple changes to a family when a child in care enters a home through foster care. Families willing to open their hearts and homes to a child in care will need support once they receive that initial call for placement.

While we started this journey for many reasons, we go into it for the same reason: to make a difference in a child’s life. Our best teacher is someone who can relate to our situation and is also bound to the same confidentiality we are. You can talk to a mentor about your case and the children in your home, knowing they will maintain the same confidentiality for your family, children in care, and the primary family. Mentorship is necessary to empower foster families through support, resources, connection, and advocacy to improve the lives of the children placed in our homes through foster care.

New families are encouraged to participate in the mentoring program. The Mentoring Program is also available for families with multiple placements who need support. You can learn more at [www.utahfostercare.org/mentors](http://www.utahfostercare.org/mentors) or contact Michelle at Utah Foster Care by calling 1-877-505-5437 or by email [michelle.ostmark@utahfostercare.org](mailto:michelle.ostmark@utahfostercare.org).

“ —  
| **PASS ON WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED.** |  
— ”

**YODA TO LUKE SKYWALKER. RETURN OF THE JEDI.**



# A Decade of Service with Utah Foster Care

By Anna Gibson, Retention Services, UFC



Senior Master Sergeant (SMSgt) Mikael Cunningham joined the Hill Air Force Base Santa Brigade in December 2013 as an Air Force volunteer driving Christmas gifts to children in foster care. He became a regular after that first year because of the magic he felt that day. Three years later, in 2016, he became the point of contact and leader of the Santa Brigade in the Northern region. Over the last seven years, the Brigade has been strengthened under his leadership and bolstered by his dedication to bringing smiles to children in foster care on Christmas day.

He has taken on a few different tasks each year due to the ever-changing needs of children in care and does it with a smile. By the time delivery day rolls around, he has dedicated about 200 hours of his time to make the day run smoothly. He shows up early and is the last to leave, and we at Utah Foster Care have been honored to work with him.

As we embark on 2024, SMSgt Cunningham will be passing along the purple Santa hat to Tech Sergeant Matthew Hicks, and while he assures me that he will continue to volunteer as long as we will have him, his ever-ready smile and “yes ma’am” will be missed in the leadership role.

One local family shared what the Santa Brigade has meant to them over the years, “The Santa Brigade has become an integral part of our holiday celebrations ever since we first were recipients of their love and magic years ago as a new foster family. It happened to be the first year we fostered, transitioning from two little girls reunifying with their family and taking in another child within a few weeks of each other during the Christmas season. We had already taken in multiple placements in only a few months and witnessed these children’s struggles. They deserved to experience the magic of Christmas; our time and resources were being pulled thin, and that’s when Utah Foster Care and the Santa Brigade came to the rescue. I’ll never forget when a group of men dressed in military uniforms arrived at our doorstep, bringing with them the hopes and wishes of these little children. Their bright smiles and genuine joy were a sight to behold; momentarily, the world felt better. I’m grateful to be part of this program with Utah Foster Care and the Santa Brigade, which spreads Christmas cheer and community connection to children and their families throughout Northern Utah. It has taught me that there are still people who care, who foster love, joy, and connection, no matter the circumstances.”

Thank you, SMSgt Cunningham, for a decade of dedication and service to children in foster care and the families who care for them. They are truly delivering Christmas magic each year.

## NORTHERN REGION UFC STAFF

**Amy Wicks**

LEAD FOSTER-ADOPTIVE CONSULTANT

**Sandy Holbrook**

FOSTER-ADOPTIVE CONSULTANT

**Anna Gibson**

RETENTION SERVICES SPECIALIST / TRAINER

**Brain Young**

TRAINER

## UTAH DIVISION OF CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES (DCFS)

### DCFS HQ

195 North 1950 West,  
Salt Lake City, UT

### Northern Region DCFS Offices

NEED TO REACH YOUR RFC?  
CALL YOUR LOCAL DCFS OFFICE

**Bountiful (801) 397-7640**

57 West 200 North

**Brigham City (435) 734-4075**

1050 South Medical Drive, #B

**Clearfield (801) 776-7300**

1350 East 1450 South

**Logan (801) 787-3400**

115 West Golf Course Road, #B

UTAHFOSTERCARE.ORG

# CLUSTERS



Support groups for foster, adoptive, and kinship families who meet monthly for support & training.

## CACHE CLUSTER

Mysti Anderson (435) 232-5274  
mysti.jordan@yahoo.com

## BOX ELDER CLUSTER

Melissa Rasmussen (801) 941-8933  
presto\_77@yahoo.com

## OGDEN NORTH CLUSTER

Meg Costantino (801) 837-0180  
megcostantino@gmail.com

## OGDEN CLUSTER

Cami Anderson (435) 757-3548  
camiaba3@gmail.com

## WEBER WEST CLUSTER

Thomas Holbrook (801) 643-3957  
thomasholbrook58@gmail.com

## DAVIS NORTH CLUSTER

Shelena Crowton (801) 589-4202  
beautiesnbows@yahoo.com

## DAVIS SOUTH CLUSTER

Lisa Clark (801) 726-4121  
ceblove1999@gmail.com

## RSVP FOR TRAININGS:

Please register for all classes on Bridge. If you need help, please contact your regional trainer.

### DAVIS NORTH/SOUTH CLUSTER

#### Let's Talk Relationships

Jeff Tesch, LMFT  
February 8, 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm  
Clearfield DCFS | 1350 E. 1450 S.  
Learn to keep relationships healthy even with the challenges of fostering.  
Dinner provided. RSVP to Shelena, 801-589-4202.

### WEBER-WEST & OGDEN CLUSTER

#### Time for Teens

February 9, 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm  
Ogden UFC | 3340 S. Harrison Blvd  
This one is just for teens, foster, adopted, or bio. Just like their parents/caregivers, teens need a chance to connect.

### STATEWIDE

#### Love Languages

Denice Beacham  
February 26, 10:00 am-Noon  
Online!

### STATEWIDE

#### Single Foster Parent Cluster

February 26, 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm  
Online!  
We meet every fourth Monday!  
Watch the Bridge app for the link and other info.

Thank you to our donors for making the holidays magical!  
We appreciate you.



thank you



*The beautiful thing about life, is that we will never reach an age where there is nothing left to learn, see or be; it's magical really." - Dulce Ruby*

## DAVIS NORTH/SOUTH CLUSTER

### Bonding & Attachment

Amy Bates, M.S.Ed  
March 14, 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm  
Clearfield DCFS | 1350 E. 1450 S.  
Understanding Attachment can help us manage relationship challenges.  
Dinner provided. RSVP to Shelena, 801-589-4202.

## STATEWIDE

### Suicide Prevention

Denice Beacham  
March 20, 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm  
Online!

## STATEWIDE

### Single Foster Parent Cluster

March 25, 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm  
Online!  
We meet every fourth Monday! Watch the Bridge app for the link and other info.

If your Cluster doesn't have a meeting listed, please watch Bridge for information about upcoming events and training.



# TRAINING



To register for in-person classes, please contact the Cluster Facilitator sponsoring the training or your region trainer.

You are welcome to attend any class being offered.

When you've completed the training, please complete the class assignment in the Training Portal.

Brian Young, Northern Region  
brian.young@utahfostercare.org

Terumi Sagers, Salt Lake Region  
terumi.sagers@utahfostercare.org

Terri Rowley, Western Region  
terri.rowley@utahfostercare.org

McKay Esplin, Eastern Region  
mckay.esplin@utahfostercare.org

Denice Beacham, Southwest Region  
denice.beacham@utahfostercare.org

Liz Rivera, Director of Education  
liz.rivera@utahfostercare.org

## TRAINING KEY

Online

In-Person

Both

# HOLIDAY MAGIC 2023

By Anna Gibson, Retention Services, UFC

In my second year leading the holiday magic, I made new mistakes and learned different lessons. I am grateful for the journey of the past two years. The Giving Tree and other holiday events look different each year because the donations from community members change from year to year. This year, the Northern Region Utah Foster Care office supported 154 children (17 more than last year).

That is 462 gifts delivered by approximately 50 United States Air Force airmen! In addition, through the 8th Annual Holiday Shindig, we were able to help about 87 additional foster, adoptive, and kinship families for the holidays. AMAZING!

A special thank you to our amazing donors who never hesitate to give of themselves and rally employees, clients, and coworkers to create holiday magic! The Giving Tree and the Holiday Shindig would not exist without them.

Barnes & Noble - Layton  
Berlin Packaging  
Carhartt - Station Park & Murray  
Center Street Grill  
Coleman Orthodontics  
First United Methodist Men's Organization  
Gospel Peace Church  
Hill Air Force Base  
Kids Town Pediatric Dentistry  
Letrono CrossFit  
Lucky Slice Pizza  
LW Miller's Truck Stop  
North Ogden Cove Community  
Northrup Grumman  
Old Dominion Freight Line  
Barnes & Noble - Layton  
Berlin Packaging  
Carhartt - Station Park & Murray  
Center Street Grill  
Coleman Orthodontics

First United Methodist Men's Organization  
Gospel Peace Church  
Hill Air Force Base  
Kids Town Pediatric Dentistry  
Letrono CrossFit  
Lucky Slice Pizza  
LW Miller's Truck Stop  
North Ogden Cove Community  
Northrup Grumman  
Old Dominion Freight Line  
Reeve & Associates  
Sego Lily Day Spa  
Seventeen 76 Pro Shop  
Sofi (Social Finance)  
Special Delivery - Susan Robison  
Spencer Stephens Construction  
St. Olaf Catholic Church  
Studio 56 Dance Company  
Vivint  
100% Chiropractic

I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to your Cluster facilitators (and their families) for their valuable time and energy. The holiday events held in the Northern region would not have been possible without their contribution. Thank you so much!







# UTAH FOSTER CARE IN THE NEWS!

CARE COMMUNITIES PILOT PROGRAM SEEKS TO SUPPORT FOSTER FAMILIES ACROSS THE STATE

BY Michael Camit, KSLNewsRadio

*Editor's Note: Care Communities will be launched statewide in the coming months. Details will be forthcoming.*

SALT LAKE CITY — Foster parents in Utah can take advantage of a new pilot program called Care Communities. The program aims to give people the chance to support foster families in the state.

The Care Communities program was first introduced into the state by Utah's First Lady, Abby Cox.

Program Director Tami Carson said foster parents face many challenges, but they don't need to face them alone.

According to Utah Foster Care, 40% of foster parents don't continue fostering past the first year. Providing more support to foster parents is one way to curb the high dropout rate.

"The children coming into foster care, the goal is for them to go home to their family, their biological or primary family. And foster parents have to do a lot of extra work to make sure that happens. So this program is an opportunity for religious communities, faith communities, nonprofits or businesses or other social groups to work with us and we give them training and then ongoing support and mentoring," said Carson.

## HOW DO CARE COMMUNITIES WORK?

Care Communities are groups that build a team to figure out the best way to serve foster parents. Carson said that most people don't know just how difficult that parenting role is.

The demands in your time are higher than traditional parenting ... You're going to relearn a lot about what parenting looks like. Those demands and time really revolve around what the best outcome [is] for these children in the home," said Carson.

Additionally, the care teams offer emotional help to foster parents. Carson shared that one infertile couple came to see how their sacrifices not only helped the children they were raising but their biological parents as well.

"Their hearts completely transformed from a couple who was here because of infertility and now was really here for these kids. And they were willing to do the work over that last year and a half. We will work as hard as possible to help the parents of these children overcome these challenges. All that time providing a loving and stable home for the children that they're caring for," Carson said.

To participate in the program, Utahns can visit the Utah Foster Care website. If you don't want to be a member of a care team, Carson said you can volunteer to help in other ways.

"Those of us who can't do that right now, we can't be foster parents right now or maybe ever, but we can be friends with and learn how to be a very intentional friend for foster families and support the parents and that hard work they're doing," said Carson.

*The state estimates there are more than 2,600 children currently in foster care in Utah.*



# NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

*By Adriana Gardiner: Adriana Gardiner served as UFC's foster-adoptive consultant and retention specialist in the Uintah Basin. She currently lives out of state and continues to serve foster families.*

As the New Year starts, we often think of new resolutions and goals to tackle over the next 365 days - whether it is spending money more frugally, losing weight, or living healthier, foster parents have a fantastic opportunity to influence others and to make a difference in the next generation and beyond. This year, keep your resolutions meaningful. Connectedness, self-care, advocacy, and inner growth are great goals to focus on as you navigate 2024.

## Make a Lasting Bond

Invest time in activities that strengthen relationships between you and your children. Game nights and other family activities that include all members are a great way to spend free time. Take a minute to compliment the children for something they have done right or acknowledge a quality in them. A few minutes spent asking about their day and actively listening to their answers go a long way. Small things add up to a lot for these children.

## Take Care of Yourself

Take time for yourself, your marriage, your friendships, and your birth/adoptive children. Foster parenting is stressful and often thankless. Taking care of yourself and your family will help to prevent burnout, and children learn to take time for self-care when they see you do it; this will be a lesson that will benefit them for the rest of their lives.

## Self-Improvement

Make time for self-improvement—maybe a college class or learning to do something you have always wanted but did not. Take time to read, exercise, listen to music, or walk. Children learn by example, and your enthusiasm for learning will be contagious.



## Advocate

You are the number one advocate for children in placement. You are the person who spends most of your time with them and knows them the best. Advocate for them. Be their voice with their case managers, therapists, school personnel, GAL, etc. Consider writing a letter with their progress report for the people involved in their case.

## Network

Take some time to network with fellow foster parents. Only other foster parents know firsthand about the complex issues of fostering children. It is a rough road, full of happiness and heartache. Seasoned foster parents can support you in traveling the road ahead and look for new foster parents to Mentor and listen to. Also, be on the lookout for new potential foster parents; you have the insight into what it takes to become a resource family and can be instrumental in finding new families for foster children.

## Keep up the good job

Being a parent is hard. Being a foster parent is harder. You are already doing it. Keep on loving and fighting for these children.



# HELP THEM KNOW THEIR STORY

by Utah Foster Care Staff



Every February since its inception, Black History Month has been a way to honor the contributions and legacy of Black leaders, both past and present. It is a time to reflect on the impact and change Black people have made on the world, including the world of foster care.

In 1976, President Ford recognized Black History Month and urged people to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.”

## Over-Represented in Utah

Blacks make up only about 1% of our population, but Black children in foster care make up about 8%. These children are over-represented in our foster care system, and when they leave their homes, they're at risk of losing more than their families. They may also lose their identity and a sense of belonging to their community. In the last couple of years, we have seen the challenges and impact all children can face with the loss of connection and belonging, and this is especially true of all children in foster care.

## Seize the Opportunity

This Black History Month, let's “seize the opportunity” to help a child in foster care know their story and empower them to know who they truly are. You can do this by asking them about their cultural and ethnic identity and prioritizing embracing who they are.

Several studies have shown that children who have a strong and positive cultural identity have greater self-esteem, higher education levels, improved coping skills, psychological adjustment, and decreased levels of loneliness and depression.



UFC limited funds available to meet special needs of children in care when DCFS is unable to.

## QUESTIONS?

### Northern Region

Anna Gibson - (801) 392-1114

### Salt Lake Valley Region

Tina Porter - (801) 994-5205

### Western Region

Amy Smith - (801) 462-0745

### Eastern Region

Shannon Smith -  
shannon.smith@utahfostercare.org

### Southwest Region

Diane Fillmore - (877) 656-8065

## REMINDER:

- Dispersal of funds can take up to four weeks
- Checks are mailed to the foster parent's home address
  - Funds are for children in foster care ONLY
- Items covered by the reimbursement or by Medicaid are not eligible

## A Word on Vacations:

A child in care can receive vacation funds 1x in their lifetime. Vacation funds are restricted monetarily & may not cover all costs.



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5296 South Commerce Drive #400  
Murray, UT 84107

[utahfostercare.org](http://utahfostercare.org)

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