



Children's Bureau

National Adoption Month Event



Engage Youth: Listen and Learn

November 17, 2020

Children's Bureau National Adoption Month Celebration

Welcome

June Dorn, National Adoption Specialist, Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families

Catherine Monet, Youth Voice

Welcome and Introduction of 2020 National Adoption Month Theme

Jerry Milner, Associate Commissioner, Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families

Adoption Story

The Ahlgren Family

Rap Performance

Nelson Cano

Remarks

Elizabeth Darling, Commissioner, Administration on Children, Youth and Families

Adoption Story

Kaplan-Hernandez Family

Welcome and Overview of Adoption Activities

Lynn Johnson, Assistant Secretary, Administration for Children and Families

Remarks

Kamilah Bunn, Chief Executive Officer, The Adoption Exchange Association

AdoptUSKids and 2020 National Adoption Recruitment Campaign

Bob Herne, National Project Director, AdoptUSKids

Melissa Otero, National Campaign Director, AdoptUSKids

Michelle Hillman, Chief Campaign Development Officer, The Advertising Council

Adoption Story

Amber Smith, Youth Voice

Remarks

Alex Azar, Secretary, US Department of Health and Human Services

2020 Adoption Excellence Awards Presentation

Close of Program

Jerry Milner, Associate Commissioner, Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families

Catherine Monet, Youth Voice



2020 Adoption Excellence Award Recipients

Family Contributions

Terri DeMarco

Ramona Graham

Hill-Jordan Family

Individuals/Professionals

Alicia Groh

La Tika Jeffery

Melinda Lis

Jane Morgan

Darcy Olsen

Kervin Olmeda Torres

Aria Williams

Child Welfare/Judicial Systemic Change

Older Child Matching Initiative



Terri DeMarco

Terri DeMarco says that being a mother of five children inspired her to create support services for other foster and adoptive parents.

Her volunteer efforts have included developing a FAMCare mission with her church and Discovery ministry program that provides support, resources, and respite to other foster and adoptive parents. As part of this program, she trains ministry staff and volunteers to care for children who have experienced trauma.

Terri also provided “Empowered to Connect” workshops in her community and volunteered for the Refresh conference in Washington State.



Ramona Graham

Ramona Graham is a foster and adoptive parent and Advocate Coordinator for CASA Jefferson County in New Orleans, Louisiana.

As a volunteer with the AdoptUSKids speakers bureau, Ramona has participated in several high-profile national and local media events supporting adoption from foster care.

Ramona is currently working with other adoptive parents to establish a 501(c)3 organization that will support and advocate for adoptive families nationwide.



Samanthia Jordan and Norman Hill are foster and adoptive parents and AdoptUSKids speakers bureau volunteers.

Samanthia, Norman, and their son, Christian, have participated in several high-profile national and local media events, including the 2019 National Adoption Month Celebration and the National Adoption Call to Action Youth Panel. The family has also helped to build online communities including the Foster Care and Adoption Life Community Support Group, which helps other foster and adoptive parents.

Samanthia and Norman are currently in the process of establishing a 501(c)3 organization that will provide support to teenage boys while they are in high school.



Alicia Groh has continually worked to strengthen adoption and child welfare policy and practice throughout her career via advocacy, consulting, coaching, writing, and more.

Alicia brings her passion for permanency and well-being for children and youth to all of her work, including in her previous roles as a Child Welfare Program Specialist in the Policy Division of the Children's Bureau and as Executive Director of Voice for Adoption. As an Independent Consultant for more than 10 years, Alicia has partnered with multiple states, tribes, nonprofit organizations, and national centers to strengthen foster and adoptive family recruitment and support, elevate youth voices, improve permanency outcomes for children and youth, and facilitate child welfare system change.



La Tika Jeffery

La Tika Jeffery aged out of foster care when she was 18 and was adopted when she was 21.

She is a current member of the AdoptUSKids speakers bureau and leader in several advocacy organizations. She's raised awareness of adoption from foster care as a participant in national media interviews, on youth panels, and in webinars.

La Tika is a Mentor with the YA (Youth Advocate) program and assists the state of Virginia with PRIDE/kinship training.



Melinda Lis

Melinda Lis is a foster and adoptive parent who has demonstrated her commitment to permanency for children and youth in all aspects of her life.

Melinda founded HuTech, a nonprofit that developed innovative programming for child welfare-involved families in Illinois. She also served as Special Assistant to the Executive Director with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, as the Project Director for the Quality Improvement Center for Adoption/Guardianship Support and Preservation, and as Director of the National Resource Center for Adoption with Spaulding for Children.

Melinda's other roles include assisting with the development of TAPP foster care training in Florida and serving as Director for the National Training and Development Curriculum Project.



Jane Morgan

Jane Morgan held numerous leadership roles in her career as a child welfare leader, including as the Director of Capacity Building Division with the Children's Bureau, where she was responsible for developing the large and extensive training and technical assistance structure that exists today to support states, territories, and tribes across the nation.

Jane also served as State Adoption Manager in Oklahoma, where she developed federal grants that improved permanency rates for children, and as the National Adoption Specialist with the Children's Bureau, where she led efforts to implement the Adoption and Safe Families Act and develop the multi-faceted AdoptUSKids project.

Jane is the founding member of the National Association of State Adoption Programs and spearheaded the national Adoption Call to Action initiative to mobilize states around an increase in permanency for waiting children.



Darcy Olsen

Darcy Olsen is a foster and adoptive parent, author, and speaker who raises awareness about the needs of children in foster care.

Darcy founded Generation Justice to advocate for children in care and support the Arizona child welfare system. The organization has furthered many bills that streamlined processes for children to achieve permanency, including teens.

Darcy also established the Generation Justice Children's Law Clinic, which provides legal assistance to children to protect their rights.



Kervin Olmeda Torres

Kervin Olmeda Torres is a Caseworker with the El Paso County Department of Human Services. In this role, he's utilized an array of child-centered strategies to ensure that children's profiles are not limited to what is written about them. His innovative approaches include recording Zoom videos that feature the youth and their team having a conversation and give families a more complete portrait of the youth.

Kervin is an outstanding worker who is committed to providing services that are tailored to each youth based on their individual needs and collaborating with his team members to ensure no youth leaves care without permanency.



Aria Williams

Aria Williams was adopted from foster care when she was a teen.

Aria is currently a member of the AdoptUSKids speakers bureau and has helped to raise awareness of adoption from foster care as an Adoption Summit panelist and a participant in an AdoptUSKids media tour and in webinars.

Aria has used her experience and voice to inform and advise child welfare professionals on agency and individual worker practices that empower youth to participate fully in their own permanency planning. She's also provided child welfare professionals with new and innovative strategies solutions for teens in care based on her personal experiences.



The Older Child Matching Initiative (OCMI) was created to achieve permanency and identify avenues toward permanency for older youth. Their work includes:

- Developing new methods for recruitment, identifying systematic barriers, and exploring solutions
- Addressing barriers for specific cases and then creating awareness of barriers for all children and youth moving to permanency
- Serving as leaders for youth, as well as among other child specific recruitment agencies, allowing other workers to shadow and learn from their experiences providing statewide knowledge and benefits

Nearly 200 youth have achieved permanency through their involvement with OCMI.

Visit the National Adoption Month Website!



This year's National Adoption Month theme is "Engage Youth: Listen and Learn."

It is well known that teenagers are less likely to be adopted and are more likely to age out of foster care without strong, stable family support. Securing lifelong connections is a critical component in determining teens' future achievement, health, and well-being. The 2020 National Adoption Month website features resources and tips to help child welfare and legal professionals develop and support both formal and informal opportunities for young people to effectively share their voice and perspective. The site also contains advice for youth in care about how to get involved with their case, share their story, and effectively advocate for permanency.

Go to the National Adoption Month website to find tools and resources that will help you recruit and support families and elevate the voices of young people:

childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/nam



A Way Out

By Nelson Cano

2 good kids living inside a bad home
Hope that u don't listen to this and think it's a sad song
Cause it's not
It's bout a boy and a girl but the boy was on the block
Only talk about my side cause it's my story from the hop
To make it short he got adopted and he thankful
Cause living how he was had broke his heart and it was painful
He lost the last of hope then started praying to his angels
He stepped foot inside the hood he never thought that it would change him
But I guess he was wrong
He wasn't happy felt like he was alone
And suicide was in his head he used to wish he was gone
He never spoke about the topic cause he felt bad
Doing drugs at home and hope his parents didn't smell that
He knew not to do it
His friends was talking and his mind got influenced
So overwhelmed he grabbed a blunt and put his problems into it
He got a dream to be a rapper he been tryna persue it
When he was young he ain't have money when he got it he blew it
He never thought his life would change this dramatically
He been overthinking tryna find another strategy
Never thought that he would be the type to have a family
Dreams of being rich some millions come in for his salary
He been thinking back in time
Wanted love ain't have no valentine
Tryna race his demons hope he go around the track in time
Life ain't treat him right he was living not keeping track of time

Bro was getting money and told him to keep a stack in mind
Hope that people listen to my story and they grow from it
Put my heart inside a box decided not to open it
Had a lot of dreams but I struggled I ain't put hope in it
Took a couple years to heal but now I'm getting over it
Growing as a man but sometimes I miss my childhood
Feelings of a kid so I'm tryna do what a father would
Tryna stay persistent and happy I always dodge the hood
Painting pictures every day I hope that my collage is good
But again it been seeming like all the pictures was painting me
And what I mean by that is my memories been persuading me
It was days I felt like heaven or hell was awaiting me
I was at my lowest point in life nobody prayed for me
But it's okay cause look at me today my life is better now
Story of my past I think it's time to put the letter down
And it's a girl inside my life I hope that I don't let her down
The first fight was a battle but my next gon' be a better round
My back was on the ropes I had to fight back
And I was making choices but some people didn't like that
It's time to change
Not just for me but for people who riding in my lane
Hope that u feel what I'm saying I'm not just spitting pain



Celebrating and Showcasing Teens!

In the pages that follow and within the event slideshow, we feature photos and quotes from teens who are currently waiting for an adoptive family or who have recently been adopted.

Thank you to the staff of state organizations and local programs who helped us obtain permission to showcase these remarkable teens during our National Adoption Month celebration.



Akyra
Age: 17

“Having a family means that I won’t have to be afraid of not being wanted anymore.”



Alex
Age: 15

“You can’t pick your parents, but you can pick your family.”

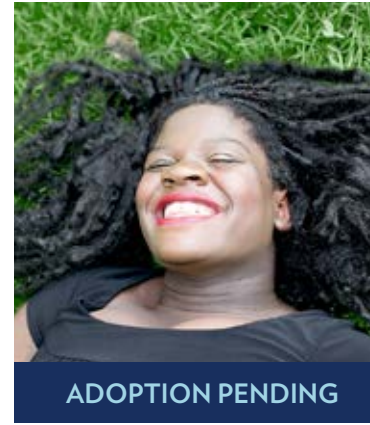
[View Alex’s profile.](#)



Alivia
Age: 15

“I want a family to know that I am not perfect, and they don’t have to be perfect either.”

[View Alivia’s profile.](#)



Aria
Age: 20

“I’m 20 years old and being adopted! It feels like a dream.”



Angel
Age: 15

“Being adopted means having a family that is nice to me and likes to do things together.”

[View Angel’s profile.](#)



Caylynn
Age: 14

“Being adopted changed me. Now I know I will fly and can accomplish anything because my parents believe in me.”



Destiny
Age: 14

“I want families to know that I have a good sense of humor and a great personality!”

[View Destiny's profile.](#)



Heleena
Age: 13

“I would like to be with a family who keeps an open mind and loves me the way that I am.”

[View Heleena's profile.](#)



Devawn'tae, Dayleon
Ages: 16, 12

“Being adopted means being accepted and sharing the rest of our lives with a family.”



Isis "Isabella"
Age: 17

“I want a family that will love me when I am sad or angry and when I am happy.”

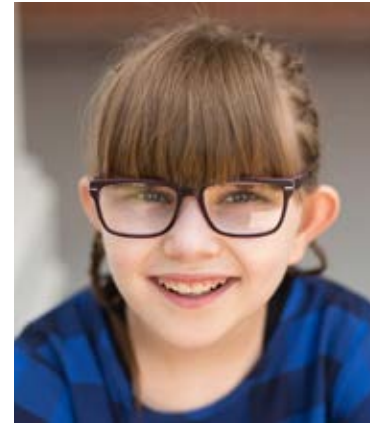
[View Isis's profile.](#)



Izaiah
Age: 13

“I want people to know that there are a lot of kids like me who need families and affection.”

[View Izaiah's profile.](#)



Jennifer
Age: 15

“Family is being together forever and feeling safe.”

[View Jennifer's profile.](#)



Javaun
Age: 16

“Adoption means being part of a family—and being loved.”

[View Javaun's profile.](#)



Jesus
Age: 15

“Adoption means that I wouldn't have to wonder where I'm going next.”

[View Jesus's profile.](#)



Josie
Age: 17

“I’m hoping for a family that is caring and fun and will always be there for me.”

[View Josie’s profile.](#)



Kallob
Age: 15

“Being adopted means having a permanent home with a family who takes care of me and loves me.”

[View Kallob’s profile.](#)



Kaden, Tracy
Ages: 13, 12

“To have a family is to have everything in the world.”



Kevin
Age: 14

“Being adopted means having someone that I can look up to who won’t give up on me.”



Kevin
Age: 14

“I’m looking for a family who will spend time getting to know me to see what a special person I am.”

[View Kevin’s profile.](#)



Maleki
Age: 15

“I want to be part of a family that puts up a Christmas tree and opens presents together.”

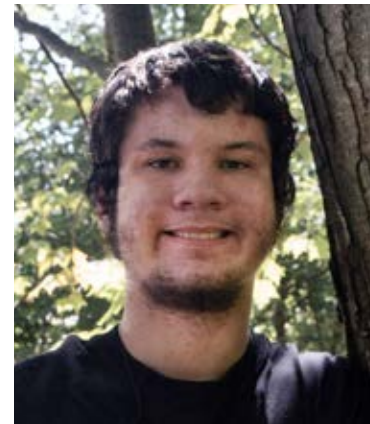
[View Maleki’s profile.](#)



Layra
Age: 14

“I want families to know that I love to cook—especially burgers—and that I am funny and kind.”

[View Layra’s profile.](#)



Mikale
Age: 16

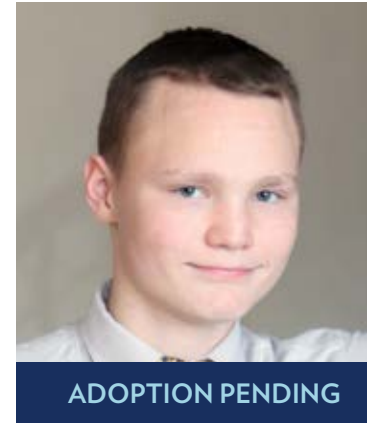
“I only have one wish, and that is to have a family.”

[View Mikale’s profile.](#)



Miracle
Age: 13

“Three words describe what being part of a family means to me: love, hope, and faith.”



Nolyn
Age: 16

“Adoption means that I am my parents’ kid by choice—that they took me in because they love me and care about me.”



Nieghjaya
Age: 14

“Adoption means a new beginning with new opportunities.”



Nora
Age: 15

“I want an adoptive family that will love me for who I am.”

[View Nora’s profile.](#)



Rachel
Age: 17

“I’m looking forward to having a family that I can celebrate the holidays with.”

[View Rachel’s profile.](#)



Ronnie
Age: 20

“I have not given up hope that there is a family waiting for me. Everyone deserves a family, no matter how old they are.”

[View Ronnie’s profile.](#)



Roman
Age: 16

“My dream family is one that will game with me.”

[View Roman’s profile.](#)



Sativa
Age: 16

“I want a family who has a good sense of humor.”

[View Sativa’s profile.](#)



Serus
Age: 16

“Being adopted means having someone you feel safe talking to and who will help prepare you for life.”

[View Serus’s profile.](#)



Zanelle
Age: 15

“I want a mother who I can talk with and a father who will take care of me—and hopefully spoil me!”

[View Zanelle’s profile.](#)



Tyler
Age: 14

“I want a good forever family!”

[View Tyler’s profile.](#)



Adopt US Kids

