



**COLORADO**  
Department of Human Services

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **As Colorado Experiences a Foster Family Shortage, Five Foster Families Inspire Others to Make a Difference**

*More than 1,200 new foster families are needed to ensure all children have a safe home*

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**DENVER (May 12, 2018)** - First Lady of Colorado Robin Hickenlooper and Reggie Bicha, executive director of the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), hosted an event today to recognize five families from across Colorado for their dedication to Colorado's kids in foster care. In addition to playing a critical role by providing safe homes for Colorado's children, each family is sharing their story to inspire others to help address the current statewide shortage of foster families. More than 100 family members, community leaders and supporters attended today's luncheon, which takes place every May during National Foster Care Month at the Governor's Mansion.

"These five families represent the very best in our communities. They saw the need to provide safe, temporary homes for kids and stepped up to meet that need," Hickenlooper said. "Foster families don't just provide a bed for these kids, they provide safety, nurturing, love, compassion and a chance to overcome the trauma that comes along with a childhood marked by abuse and neglect. I hope these five families and their stories inspire others to become foster parents."

In October 2017, CDHS estimated that Colorado needs 1,200 additional foster families by 2019. This number would allow caseworkers to choose among many possible foster families so that each child or teen's unique needs are met and they're able to stay close to home.

"This event is about celebrating foster families, but it's also our chance to call on every Coloradan to play a role in helping kids succeed," Bicha said. "Children are resilient. Even when they've been exposed to adverse experiences like abuse or neglect, they can overcome them and reach their full potential with help and support from a dedicated adult, like a foster parent."

Most children and teens served through the child welfare system in Colorado are helped in their own homes. More than 68 percent of the 20,923 children and teens served by county human services agencies throughout Colorado last year were able to continue living at home while their parents learned new skills and addressed safety concerns.

However, sometimes it is not possible for county human services agencies to ensure the safety of the child in their own home while connecting parents and caregivers with support and services. Today in Colorado, there are approximately 4,889 children and teens in an "out-of-home placement" like a foster family, group home or residential treatment center for their safety.

Before a caseworker tries to find a foster family for a child or teen, they work to locate family or friends willing to provide a temporary home while the parent or caregiver works to improve the situation at home. These families are known as

"kinship families." There are approximately 1,616 children or teens living with a kinship family, and there are approximately 2,156 children and teens living with a foster family.

An additional 805 children or teens are living in a congregate setting, such as a residential treatment center or group home. Many of these 805 children and teens are ready to live with a foster family, where they are better able to heal from their past traumatic experiences, but no foster family is available to care for them.

"On an average day in Colorado, 14 kids enter foster care while their parents take time to learn valuable parenting skills, but we do not have enough foster families to meet the need. We all know kids need stability, but without enough families to care for the kids who need them, kids can end up moving homes and schools too frequently. This year, we worked closely with Legislators to provide more support for foster parents and to help more kids remain in their school, reduce the dropout rate for students in foster care, and help more kids make it to graduation day. We're working hard to help more Colorado kids succeed," Bicha said.

We all play a role in preventing child abuse and neglect. To learn how you can become a foster parent in Colorado, visit [CO4Kids.org](http://CO4Kids.org).

The families honored at the luncheon include:

1. BJ and Sol Baumgardner from Monte Vista
2. Emily and Jeff Hendrix from Broomfield
3. Carla and John Londo from Colorado Springs
4. Anne Marks and Ingrid Olson from Fort Collins
5. Ann and Mario Perricone from Denver

#### **BJ and Sol Baumgardner - Monte Vista, certified by Alamosa County**

The Baumgardners became foster parents 14 years ago. Since that time, they have fostered countless kids and adopted three. BJ and Sol want to provide a home for young people living in the San Luis Valley, so they can stay close to home while in foster care. The Baumgardners speak passionately about their role as foster parents. First, they want the kids to know they are safe, then they get to know each child and understand their unique strengths - all while supporting reunification with a child or teen's family. All of the kids in the Baumgardner home play sports and sing. It helps to build confidence, BJ and Sol say, but it's also a great way to have fun and stay active as a family.

#### **Emily and Jeff Hendrix - Broomfield, certified by Broomfield County**

Emily and Jeff became foster parents to grow their family through adoption. However, Emily and Jeff think that one of the greatest impacts they've had as foster parents has been the positive relationships with the parents of children who have been in foster care. They have also connected with other foster families in Broomfield to create a support group and bring in experts to share trauma-informed parenting advice. Emily and Jeff both agree that children and teens who have been abused or neglected will be impacted by that experience throughout their entire lives, but they've also seen firsthand how resilient kids are. Each child or teen's healing journey begins with a foster family ready to provide a home when it's needed the most.

#### **Carla and John Londo - Colorado Springs, certified by Ariel, a child placement agency**

Twenty-three years ago, Carla was working at a child placement agency when she heard about a teen who needed a place to stay that night. Could she and John help? Carla said yes, and they haven't looked back. The Londos knew early on that they connected best with teen boys, so they made a commitment to each other, to the teens in their home and to their community to stick with these young men and help them grow and become adults. In the more than two decades that they've fostered, and after adopting 11 kids, John and Carla have learned that young people in foster care need love, but they also need to feel safe and to know that someone who cares about them will always be there to help.

#### **Anne Marks and Ingrid Olson - Fort Collins, certified by Larimer County**

Anne and Ingrid had been friends for 15 years before Ingrid asked Anne if she wanted to become foster parents together. In the past, they had each thought about doing it on their own, but this new idea — two friends who didn't live together and

had never been parents becoming a foster family – sounded impossible. They, and Larimer County, made it work. Anne and Ingrid have found that they have different parenting styles that complement each other.

**Ann and Mario Perricone - Denver, certified by the Collaborative Foster Care Program of Arapahoe, Douglas and Jefferson Counties**

The Perricones believe that everyone should give back to their community, and they give back by being foster parents. For the past 11 years, Ann and Mario have offered a safe, loving home for kids of all ages. Their focus is always on the child's family – whether that means reuniting with a parent or meeting, and eventually living with, a pre-adoptive family. The Perricones currently do mutual care, which involves caring for a pregnant mom who is in foster care or a new mom in foster care and her baby. The Perricones remain close with the mom of an infant they have cared for, and together, they speak about their experiences with potential foster parents who are going through the certification process.

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