Governor Polis and CDHS Launch Child Abuse Prevention Month, Highlight Resilience of Colorado Parents

DENVER (April 1, 2021) — Today, Governor Jared Polis and Michelle Barnes, executive director of the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), will join Colorado families, community partners, county leaders and child advocates for a virtual launch of Child Abuse Prevention Month. The online event can be viewed at facebook.com/CO4Kids and will feature four Colorado families sharing stories of parental resilience while parenting in the pandemic.

“COVID-19 has added stressors for parents and caregivers, requiring them to adjust to new norms while staying strong in the face of stress. Families are building and maintaining positive relationships with people they can call on for help and need access to the resources they need in order to thrive,” said Barnes.

Since Colorado’s stay-at-home order was issued in March 2020, local county departments of human/social services assessed the safety of more than 51,373 children and youth. Of those children and youth, 12,503 experienced abuse or neglect and 13,591 families received voluntary support to help prevent child abuse or neglect in the future.

Research has shown that five protective factors strengthen families and lessen the likelihood of child abuse or neglect. These include: parental resilience, strong social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, access to concrete supports in times of need, and social and emotional competence of children.

“These four families will share their experiences of finding resources, support and coping strategies that have allowed them to parent effectively, even during this challenging time. This is an important reminder that we all need help from time to time and that it is always okay to ask for help,” said Barnes. “These families demonstrate how specific factors play a role in improving a parent’s capacity to cope effectively with typical day-to-day stresses.”

The four families who will share their stories are:

Ashley Breidenbach, Fort Collins
Protective Factors: Knowledge of parenting and child development; Social and emotional competence of children
Ashley is a proud mom to 12-year-old Tristan. When news of COVID-19 hit, Ashley knew the importance of communicating with Tristan about what was happening in a way that he would understand. Ashley created a routine to bring normalcy to their lives. Cooking dinners together, mastering TikTok dances and cross-stitching are just some of the activities that have kept Ashley and Tristan busy.
For Ashley, it is important that she and Tristan maintain an open and honest line of communication in their home. Ashley’s ability to model how to express and communicate emotions effectively, self-regulate and make friends has played a critical role in Tristan’s health and emotional development.

Anna and Bryson Creighton, Aurora
Protective Factor: Parental resilience
Anna and Bryson are parents to two girls who are 20-months and 4-years old. Anna and Bryson introduced new traditions, such as a chakra singing bowl and family meditation at bedtime, visits to their family barn and caring for plants, to help them adjust during the pandemic.

Effective communication and making the time to prioritize and understand one another’s needs have been key in their teamwork as parents and as spouses. Anna and Bryson are most proud that they have built the flexibility and inner-strength necessary to bounce back when facing challenges and feel well-equipped to cope with the stresses of everyday life.

Lisa McGinnett, Palisade
Protective Factor: Social connections
Lisa McGinnett and her husband are busy parents with three teenagers, a two-year-old and an infant in foster care. After managing a work-from-home schedule, never-ending laundry and dishes for a family of eight while supporting her children in remote learning, Lisa understands the importance of asking for help.

Lisa has always helped others and says that asking for help was humbling, but necessary. Lisa’s co-workers, church community and even her best friend in Hawaii have been there with an encouraging word, meal or a laugh. Lisa admits that vulnerability can be tough, but having an emotionally supportive social network makes everything easier for her family.

Judith Padilla, Denver
Protective Factor: Concrete supports
Judith is a single mother of seven children. Although the pandemic has brought many unknowns, Judith values spending quality time with her kids, playing in the snow or just hanging out. As her family adjusts to new norms, Judith has worked especially hard to ensure that she is an example for her kids.

In addition to managing stressors brought on by COVID-19, Judith and her family were displaced after a fire destroyed their apartment in October. Over the past year, Judith has found support groups and community organizations to help her access the services her family needs. Judith is grateful for the continued services that community organizations have provided amidst the pandemic.

The Colorado Department of Human Services CO4Kids campaign encourages all Coloradans to help strengthen families and communities. To learn about the signs of child abuse and neglect and for information about how to become a foster or adoptive parent visit CO4Kids.org. Call 844-CO-4-Kids to report concerns about child abuse and neglect. If a child or youth is in immediate danger, dial 9-1-1.