



PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Paula Tolson
410: 767-8947

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Friday, May 20, 2016

May is National Foster Care Awareness Month

Maryland's Human Services Agency Celebrates by Fostering Faith, Hope and Love

Dorchester, Caroline, Wicomico, Worcester, Queene Anne's & Somerset (May 20, 2016)

State child welfare professionals are implementing family centered focus strategies to enhance the child welfare service delivery as it relates to Maryland's Foster Care Program. Children placed in the care of the state are faring better because of the type of services they are receiving. As a result of abuse and neglect, children must be removed from their homes. In Maryland, we are fortunate to have caring citizens who make a difference in young lives by welcoming them into their hearts, lives and home making them feel safe and protected. "It's the quality of care that is making the real difference in the lives of these children," said Governor Hogan.

May is Foster Care Awareness month. It is a time to reflect on the needs of our children and to ensure that they have a safe place to call home. In Maryland, we are taking time out to recognize some of the outstanding citizens who are providing safety and wellbeing during such a critical time in their lives. "When a child needs protection, we intervene with a plan of safety and ongoing security," said DHR Secretary Sam Malhotra. "Our foster homes provide a safe nurturing environment for children in need of stability during a traumatic time."

The DHR child welfare professionals are taking time to recognize those unsung heroes who step up in defense of children and have identified foster parents from around the state who has gone beyond answering the call for help.

On Sunday May 22, 2016 **Dorchester County** will recognize Foster Parent **Joan Gounraj** for her 1 year and 2 months of service in the foster care program. She has been an approved Resource Parent since February 20, 2015. In the short period of time she has had three respite placements. One of the placements was a 19 year old male who was placed with her from May 28, 2015 to June 23, 2015. Shortly thereafter Ms. Gounraj was asked to provide respite to a 13 year old male. Ms Gounraj provided a safe nurturing environment for one month for this emotionally disabled child. She lets children in her care know that they are loved and included in her family. She exemplifies our agency's mission to strengthen and support children and their families.

The Maryland Department of Human Resources protects the State's vulnerable children and adults and provides temporary economic assistance. DHR strengthens Maryland families and improves communities through its 24 Departments of Social Services, community partnerships and its four administrations: the Social Services Administration, Family Investment Administration and Child Support Enforcement Administration.

- Larry Hogan, Governor
- Boyd k. Rutherford , Lt. Governor
- Sam Malhotra, Secretary

In **Caroline County, Bonnie and Randy Scott** was chosen as foster parents of the year because of their interest in one specific child. They had a relationship with this child and the child's family and felt that, rather than have him in a random foster home, they could give him a good home and meet his needs. The Scotts are comfortable in communicating with the child's worker and do so without hesitation. This child knows he will always have a place to call home and a family that loves him even after he is grown and living on his own

Worcester County selected Foster Parents **Tracy & Katrina Mason** with 1 year of service. They have gone above and beyond in ensuring that the medical, dental and mental health needs of the children in their care are met. They are always willing to adjust their schedule to accommodate changes, even at the last minute. Tracy and Katrina are willing to work with birth parents in order to maintain what is in the child's best interest. They meet each and every situation with an open mind and open hearts.

Frances King of Wicomico County has fostered children for 6 years. The household was first licensed in September 2009 and during tenure, has accepted 9 foster placements, 16 respite placements and adopted 1 medically fragile infant. Ms. King's nomination is very significant as she has faced a series of personal conflicts in her life that has not swayed her commitment to Maryland's children in the least. Two of her placements have been for a teen mom and child. She is definitely an example of one who has persevered with the help of her faith, hope and love.

Somerset County DSS has chosen to honor **Orlena and James Williams** for their one-year of service to their community. Mr. and Mrs. Williams have been licensed resource parents for one year and they have been willing to help provide the children in foster care a warm and stable environment. They provided monthly respite services for two sibling groups to preserve their placements, as well as, several other children in need. The family currently has two placements with three children under the age of three. One of which is a sibling group of two. The couple provides a stable and loving environment for the children. The family accepts the current placement as a part of the family and encourages them on their journey to permanency.

The **Queen Anne's County DSS** recognizes Earl and **Nancy Leager** for their 14 year commitment to the county. The family emulates what foster parents should be. They provide a safe, stable environment so that children who come to their home know what to expect from their care providers. They are able to help children see their positives and provide hope for their future, whether it is in their home or another placement. The Leagers' are willing to give children a fighting chance". They have accepted many placements over the years that many providers would not have been willing to take. They care for these children because they have faith that their contribution makes a difference in a child's life whether for one night or for an extended period of time.

###

The Maryland Department of Human Resources protects the State's vulnerable children and adults and provides temporary economic assistance. DHR strengthens Maryland families and improves communities through its 24 Departments of Social Services, community partnerships and its four administrations: the Social Services Administration, Family Investment Administration and Child Support Enforcement Administration.

- Larry Hogan, Governor
- Boyd k. Rutherford , Lt. Governor
- Sam Malhotra, Secretary