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Local Foster Parents Talk Milestones, Hardships

By LAURA BOAGGIO Daily News-Record
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Christine Costello and John Costello [far right] pose with their two adopted sons Blaine and River.

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For Christine Costello, becoming a foster parent was a long time coming. Costello and her husband decided to foster two brothers in October of 2016 through the Children Services of Virginia. In 2018, the couple officially adopted Blaine, 8, and River, 6.

Costello was adopted, and she always had a passion for becoming a foster mom.

"I felt like I wanted to give back," she said.

March is Social Work Month and a time to highlight how social workers have enriched society by empowering people and communities to overcome hurdles that prevent them from living life to the fullest, according to Children's Services of Virginia.

The agency, a private foster care agency with offices in Harrisonburg, Winchester and Fredericksburg, is one of many organizations celebrating Social Work Month, according to Rebekah Schennum, resource parent recruiter at in Harrisonburg.

"Of course we love to recognize our own social workers," Schennum said. "We have a very dedicated team from our administrators down to our treatment care workers."

Costello said one of her favorite parts about being a foster parent is watching her foster children grow emotionally and physically.

After adopting their two sons, the Costellos decided to foster another child, C [an abbreviation of the child's name]. C is now 3 years old and the couple have been fostering him for about 19 months.

Costello said she and her husband have been working with C to address his trauma.

"Even at 19 months later, we're still dealing with that — the trauma that came before," she said.

A good way to help mitigate it is by developing routine in the household, Costello said.

"Schedules are important," she said.

Consistency is important to a foster child — Costello's children work better with schedules, she said. Her two sons will often ask what the plans are for the day as soon as they wake up.

Costello said she has enjoyed watching C grow and hit developmental milestones. He potty trained before he turned 3, he can trace his name and hold a pencil correctly, and he can count to 13.

"Yesterday he colored between the lines," she said.

Grace Yoder, another foster parent with Children's Services of Virginia, said she enjoys watching her foster child go through milestones too.

Yoder welcomed an infant boy into her family of five last April. Yoder has three biological children of her own, aged 7, 5 and 2.

Similar to Costello, Yoder said she has been working hard to establish trust with her foster child — it just looks a little different with an infant.

"Because he's a baby, I've been able to wear him in a carrier and a wrap to try and build that attachment," Yoder said.

Through positive body language, regular feeding schedules and lots of love, she's providing a safe place for her foster child.

It's not easy work though, Yoder said.

Her foster kid came with quite a few needs which resulted in lots of doctor visits, therapy sessions, meetings with social workers, and sleepless nights and days.



Grace and Mike Yoder pose with their three biological children (from left) Mason, Lucy and Willa.

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"We believe that life is precious and we recognize there are cases when parents are unable to care for children," Yoder said.

She keeps in touch with her foster child's biological parents through email, sending pictures and updates.

While fostering might not be for everyone, Costello and Yoder urged anyone considering it to reach out to foster agencies and get educated.

"Really there's never a perfect time," Yoder said.

Yoder found out about Children's Services of Virginia through her church friends who spoke highly about its foster parent training sessions and general support through the process.

Schennum said one of her favorite parts of working at a foster agency is getting to connect foster parents with resources. Another is getting to celebrate the success with foster families and their children when she's able to help them through a hard time.

"Our foster families do a great job for trying to provide education and support," Schennum said.

Children's Services of Virginia holds information sessions at its offices and virtually. From the time a person or couple attend an information session to the time they receive an approval letter is two to four months, according to its website.

"There's always a need because we are constantly receiving referrals," Schennum said.

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