



NEWS RELEASE

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CDHS Recognizes Five Colorado Foster Families

(DENVER, May 14, 2016) - First Lady of Colorado Robin Hickenlooper and Reggie Bicha, Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), on Saturday recognized five families as part of National Foster Care Month. Nearly 100 people attended the luncheon celebration at the Governor's Mansion. Families from several Colorado counties and the Southern Ute Tribe were honored for their dedication to Colorado's foster kids.

"This is one of my favorite days of the year. Today, we honor Colorado's 'Everyday Heroes' who open their hearts and homes to our most vulnerable children. It is a joy to recognize some of our state's very best." Bicha said. "On an average day in Colorado, four children come into foster care. We hope that more Coloradans will consider opening their homes to children in their community who need a family."

"Children are Colorado's most precious resource," said First Lady Robin Hickenlooper. "When kids thrive, our communities' thrive; and our children and youth involved in the child welfare system can't thrive without wonderful foster parents.

"I am so proud to be here today to thank some of Colorado finest parents for embracing these children and teens, and their cultures, in the hopes of giving them a brighter future -one that we know all children deserve."

The families honored included:

- Nedra and Matt Cox from the greater Denver metro area
- Kelli Woodard from the greater Denver metro area
- Kristy Pabilonia and Brendan Podell from Fort Collins, Colo.
- Fernando and Aracely Garcia from Evans, Colo.
- Velma Armijo from the Southern Ute Indian Reservation

(See Page 2 of release for more about these families.)

Today, there are approximately 2,000 children and youth in foster care in Colorado and little over 2,000 certified foster homes. Colorado social services agencies are in need of foster homes, particularly families who are willing to care for children with special needs, sibling groups, and older youth.

To learn more and watch a short video about each family visit cofosterandadopt.org.



Cox Family

Nedra and Matt Cox were first-time foster parents. Because they didn't have previous parenting experience, they were concerned about their ability to care for a child with significant medical issues or other special needs. So they requested a child without such needs. However, soon after their foster son arrived in their home, he was diagnosed with a rare form of childhood cancer. Thankfully, Nedra and Matt never wavered in their commitment to this little boy, even in the face of this unexpected hurdle. As their foster son fought cancer and numerous other health crises that placed them in isolation at Children's Hospital Colorado, they were amazing caregivers who stayed in constant communication with their child's biological mother, keeping her informed as any mother would want to be. It wasn't their original goal to adopt their foster child, but they remained open to that possibility. They finalized their son's adoption this spring.

Pabilonia Podell Family

Kristy Pabilonia and Brendan Podell became foster parents 5 1/2 years ago, and, since that time, they have cared for eight children. They are both full-time professors at Colorado State University's College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences. And, despite their busy careers, supporting families in need by fostering had been a longtime goal of theirs. They focus on building strong relationships with the biological families of the children in their care and try to stay connected long after the children return home. They have taught all the kids who have been in their home to ski; some even return to go skiing with them. Kristy and Brendan plan to continue to foster for a long time and even purchased a larger car so they have more space for additional children.

Garcia Family

Fernando and Aracely Garcia began their foster care journey thinking they might adopt, but after learning about the large need, they decided to remain committed to helping Colorado's children through foster care. They believe in keeping siblings connected and in supporting older children and teens in foster care. They support family reunification, with the understanding that biological families and kinship are the ideal resolution to foster care, and they urge everyone to open their hearts to fostering without the ultimate goal of adoption.

Woodard Family

Kelli Woodard is a single foster mom to four boys who came to the United States through the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program. While she is teaching them about life in America, she believes strongly in keeping their own cultural traditions intact and actively engages the boys in local community connections that build those bonds. Her house is full of the music, food, clothing, and language of her foster sons' homelands.

Armijo Family

Velma Armijo always wanted to become a foster parent and finally did so when she started working for Southern Ute Social Services. She strongly believes that "it takes a village to raise a child." As a single foster mom, her sister and her adult son also help out by providing respite care. She encourages other native families to become foster parents to help kids stay within their culture and their community on the reservation. She says her foster children have taught her about being patient, and she feels they are changing her life as much as she is changing theirs. ###