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Roger Williams University School of Law

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Newsroom

1L Levine on Foster Care, Adoption

Connecticut's Stamford Advocate highlights the story of 1L Rachael Levine in a special Valentine's Day feature on foster care and adoption.

From the Stamford Advocate of Stamford, Conn.: "[The ultimate valentine: When fostering leads to adoption](#)" by contributing writer Sandra Diamond Fox



DANBURY, Conn., February 14, 2011: While Feb. 16 may be the day of **Rachael Levine's** birthday, to her the date July 25 is even more special.

"That was the day I first met my adoptive family," said Levine, 22, of Danbury, **who is in her first year of law school at Roger Williams University in Rhode Island.**

"When I was younger, my family and I always celebrated this day. When the calendar turns to July 25 each year, I still call my mom to reminisce," **she said.**

Levine went into foster care at the age of 13 through the Department of Children and Families' Danbury office of Foster Care and Adoption Services, 131 West St. The DCF provides services to improve child safety, ensure that more children have permanent families and advance their overall well-being.

"My stepfather was being abusive and my biological mother was ignoring it. It was a neglect issue. I ran away to a friend's house and called the DCF. They put me into placement in a foster home. Two weeks after that, I was taken to the family that ended up adopting me when I was 17," **Levine said.**

From the moment she began living with her adopted family, "my life has been great. I never felt as loved, cared about, or provided for like I felt once I met my adopted family. It feels like I was born into this family," **said Levine**, whose positive experiences with the foster care system have inspired her to pursue a career as an attorney for child protective services.

"I'm always surprised to hear the misconception that foster children come into care because they are delinquents. Children enter state care due to abuse or neglect. It's our job to keep them safe," said Yvette Newton of Newtown, a DCF social worker.

According to Newton, the DCF recognizes the importance of family. "As soon as we get a new child in our system, we try our best for reunification with the biological family, but if that isn't possible, we begin to arrange for alternative permanency placement. We don't want children sitting in the system for long."

Newton explained that the foster care process is very extensive and is not a decision to be taken lightly. All foster families must go through a 30-hour training and assessment. Topics covered include attachment issues, loss, discipline, effects of abuse and neglect, the foster parent's role, sexual abuse and cultural competency.

"We haven't seen many people who take advantage of the system," said Newton. Prior to licensing a home for a foster child, we do a thorough background check. Foster parents are required to submit paperwork requiring proof of income and proof that they can pay all their bills."

Erik and Brian Lindwall-Thomas began foster care training at the DCF in Danbury in 2004, in anticipation of eventually adopting "one or two kids," said Brian Lindwall-Thomas, 37, of Monroe, who works as a director in a public safety center.

Today, the couple has adopted a sibling group of four foster children who range in age from 2 to 8 years old.

"The children's biological parents were young and couldn't provide for their basic needs in a safe environment. Our goal has always been to keep the children together," Brian Lindwall-Thomas said.

"DCF provided a very positive support system. There is a great network of parents who we met through it," he added.

For New Milford couple Kara and Bernie Pfeifer, "being a foster parent is something we have always wanted to do," said Kara Pfeifer, 46.

While the Pfeifers had given money or volunteered their time to help children in need in the past, "we felt we wanted to make more of a difference in their lives firsthand. We are blessed with three happy, healthy children and a good marriage, and we have a lot of love to give," said Kara Pfeifer, 46, who is a stay-at-home mother.

Over the past three years, Pfeifer has taken in a total of five foster children, including a three-month-old infant for whom she is currently caring. "She's fantastic -- the best baby," Kara Pfeifer said.

"Each child we have had fit perfectly into our busy life. My husband and I have realized that everything they have been through has made them extremely adaptable. They just go with the flow.

"For all the time and energy you give toward caring for a foster child, you get it back ten-fold. It's so rewarding when you see what a connection you have made in their lives," she added.

To read more, click [here](#).