

Adoption Rhode Island News

The hope that you make possible

Spring/Summer 2018

“If we don’t stand up for children, then we don’t stand for much.”

Marian Wright Edelman

These are dangerous times for children. Too many are being hurt every day.

Thank you for standing with us to give the most vulnerable youth a voice that must be heard. And the future they deserve.

The national and local opioid crisis is fueling increases in the abuse and neglect of children. Children who are experiencing trauma that will have a lifelong impact. For the first time in several years, the number of children entering foster care nationally is rising.

All of the evidence points to the same thing. Children need to be in families in order to heal, and to have the best outcomes after adoption. While at the same time, services to children and families are threatened by proposed cuts to child welfare budgets and policy decisions nationally, and right here in Rhode Island.

Read more inside about standing up for children. They need you.



ARI Is Giving Voice to the Hopes and Dreams of Children In Foster Care and Changing Futures.

Approaching the journey to permanency armed with the tools we need, and ready to listen—thanks to your support.

Two sisters separated in foster care longed to be a part of each other’s lives—forever. A dream they shared with Adoption Rhode Island’s team. A dream that recently came true when they were adopted the same day—each by a family committed to keeping them connected. A commitment the families can keep, knowing ARI will be there for support and whatever help they need.

For a child beginning the adoption journey, the first meeting with one of ARI’s Permanency Coordinators is an important step on the path to a family and a better future. It is the moment a promise is made to do all we can—for as long as needed—to find the family to love and keep him or her safe. It begins with listening. Proving to be an adult who cares, and who recognizes the hurt and the fear that has overcome hope. Digging as deep as we can and exploring every possibility to keep our promise, while bringing hope into his or her life.

I hear you and I’m here for you. *“I want every child I meet to know, ‘I’m going to have hope for you until you have hope again. I will be your voice while I help you to believe your voice matters.’ ”* notes ARI Permanency Coordinator Shannon Doherty. *“Healing happens when we really listen. We learn things about what a child is carrying—loss and fear and even blaming themselves for something that was never, ever their fault.”*

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Voices you help us to hear lead to changed lives.

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When Ethan* was moved out of a foster placement in the middle of the night because of a sudden illness in the foster family, he believed it was his fault. That he did something wrong—because no one ever told him any differently. Until Ethan came to Adoption RI and found someone to listen. And, to answer his questions about the past. Now he is on the path to being with a family, better prepared and with more hope that his dreams will become a reality.

Eleven year old Laura* stood by the side of her six-year-old sister and answered the Judge with a definitive ‘YES’ when asked if she wanted to be adopted. That resounding ‘yes’ might not have happened a few months before. Getting there took the team of her **Adoption RI Permanency Coordinator and Clinician**, working together and really listening to what was behind Laura’s resistance to moving forward. And the love and commitment of her soon-to-be adoptive mom who did not give up—because she knew she was not in it alone. They helped Laura to sort through and reconcile what had happened—the loss and grief that she felt. It was work that needed to happen before she could see herself as part of the loving family that came together on that recent adoption day.

The trauma children in foster care experience has an impact on so much of their lives—how they see themselves and what they expect (or don’t expect) from others. From the day we meet a child or teen, ARI’s team asks the right questions and uses every tool we have to help them come to understand what has happened in the past, to learn to trust, and to believe their life can be better—preparing children for the future they deserve in a family who will love them and keep them safe.



We are standing up for children and families with you by our side.

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Advocating for all children to have safe and stable families, access to trauma-informed mental and physical health care and opportunities to thrive.

We were there with youth in foster care, advocates, and the RI Coalition for Children and Families, on May 31st at the RI State House, to demand our legislators “**Invest In Our Children.**” Many ARI supporters joined in the rally to support the **Young Adult Voluntary Extension of Care Act (VECA)** to extend foster care to age 21, and ensure youth have the support they need to transition to adulthood. Letters, emails and phone calls from our community have been critical to ARI’s advocacy for the VECA legislation beginning with last year’s session.

Supporters also rallied to stop cuts to RI DCYF’s budget and called for increased funding to meet the growing need for preventative and protective services, increased supports that strengthen families, and the resources for the most vulnerable children who deserve to be safe and cared for in a family.

“We have more than 2,000 amazing, talented and beautiful infants, children and youth placed, through no fault of their own, in our foster care system. They are counting on us to invest in their safety and well-being.”

Darlene Allen, ARI Executive Director and CEO speaking at the May 31st Rally.



Repairing Broken Bonds With Your Help



Life-changing reunions offer new beginnings and hopeful futures.

With you, ARI is bringing separated siblings together and strengthening the bonds that help define who we are.

So much is left behind the moment a child comes into foster care.

That can include the connection to a brother or sister who ends up in a different foster placement. Time goes by and multiple placements take place—or even some siblings in a family are adopted—and it’s easy to lose touch. Yet, we know that these are the relationships that are a deep connection to who we are.

Opportunities for reunions, and adoptions of siblings together are increasing because of your help.

“Who knows us better than our siblings? Our relationships with our brothers and sisters are among the most important in our life.

We work very hard to give children the best life possible, and that includes making sure they grow up with siblings by their side. When that’s not possible, we’ll do all we can to be sure they are in each others lives.

We are grateful for all of our partners who offer opportunities for them to be together while we do all we can with support and clinical services to overcome what is keeping them apart. It’s such an important part of their healing and well-being to make sure we make those connections happen.”

Emily Lyon, ARI’s Assistant Director

ARI’s team sifts through countless records in the search for families and anyone connected to a child’s past—often discovering siblings that ended up on different paths in care. These discoveries lead to reunions that answer long-held questions about ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Is there someone out there who is a part of me—who looks like me?’ Supported by ARI’s team—including our clinicians— children and teens then have the chance to form the kind of relationships that we all cherish.

Danny* is preparing to leave care soon as a young adult. His ARI **Teen Focus** team has been searching past records to help with his transition to adulthood. Danny was in foster care for most of his childhood. He did not know, until the search turned up an important discovery, that he had two younger siblings. Reaching out to their adoptive parents, and to several older siblings who had not been a part of Danny’s life for many years, led to the very large group—six siblings in all—getting together for lunch. Danny now feels a little less alone as plans are being made for the brothers and sisters to keep in touch with each other going forward.

For siblings waiting to be adopted, ARI will seek a family ready to open their hearts to welcome all of them, and ensure they grow up together. At the same time, we are a support for these children and their adoptive families as they come to understand the challenges they may face, and to know there is someone to help throughout their adoption journey.

Even though one sister hoped for a family where she would have her own room and no pets, and the other thought she’d like to share a room and have a hundred cats, there was no dispute about what was non-negotiable. To stay together. While an older sister had been adopted previously, the two girls had not been separated from each other. Not only were the girls adopted together, they have also reunited with their older sister. And, through her, gained even more ‘family.’ They’ve all become regulars at ARI’s events and activities that are possible because of support from our donors and corporate partners.

**Some names and photos in this publication have been changed for privacy.*

Youth voices raised through empowering opportunities you made possible.

Recent Foster Youth Forum at ARI welcomed young people committed to breaking the cycle for kids leaving care.

They came together, in a place they consider a home base, to take a risk. Young people, aged 18 to 26, all foster care alumni. Each with a story to tell about their life in foster care. And each wanting to be part of changing the story for others.

National foster care advocate and Voice for Adoption Executive Director Schylar Baber was invited by ARI's Youth Transition Services program for this special alumni forum. He immediately put the group at ease by sharing his personal journey in foster care. Assuring the group that he knows what it's like to be viewed as a bad kid and the damage that comes with that label. Asserting that instead of labels, the question that should be asked is, *"what terrible things happened to you?"* The group soon realized he 'got it'. That he understood them. That he **was them**.

Opening up about their own experiences in care, and their struggles and successes as young adults, these young people had plenty to say. Each knows first hand what the future looks like aging out of the system without support, connection or a plan. They talked about resilience and where it comes from and responded to the hope that Schylar shared that their future can be different.

Their message to us—that **to make it, every child needs and deserves someone in their corner.**

Forum hosted by ARI's Youth Transitions Services to be springboard for new Foster Care Alumni Group.

Group will be led by young adults who have personal experience with foster care.

Inspired by each other, young people left ARI's Foster Youth Forum committed to help others—to give voice to the experiences of young people like them, and to use their stories to make change.

Plans are now in the works for the launch of a **Foster Care Alumni Group** to advocate, to support, and to help young people leaving foster care to beat the odds stacked against them.



"We cannot let kids fall through the cracks and shatter."

Schylar Baber, Executive Director, Voice For Adoption

Before joining the youth forum in the evening, Schylar spoke with a group of ARI friends about the importance of family and doing all we can to heal and give hope to children in foster care.

He also spent the morning in our offices where he observed, **"Adoption Rhode Island is an agency of resilience,"** making note of what we know happens every day. That no matter the challenge, when a child, or teen, or family needs us, our team at ARI jumps right in to do everything possible to make life better. We could not do it without your support.

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Dedicated ARI volunteer shares thoughts on keeping the wheels turning at ARI to give children have a better life.

"If the electricity bill isn't paid, then there's no place for the case workers to do their job, there are no computers to communicate with potential adoptive families and there's no way to organize the special events that help these kids feel like kids."

Melisa Verrecchia, ARI Volunteer

I am often asked about my volunteer work at ARI. *"Do you get to work with the kids?"* *"What do you actually do there?"*

People tend to chuckle when I tell them that I do a lot of data entry, cold calls and stuffing envelopes for mass mailings. However, I see this as an opportunity to remind them that this work is another spoke in the wheel that keeps Adoption Rhode Island moving forward and helping kids.

I started volunteering at ARI to have a more hands-on experience with the organization that my family has supported for several years. Like any well-informed donor doing due diligence, I wanted to better understand how my donations were being used. To know that the children in state care here in Rhode Island are directly benefitting.

Quite simply, I want to know my donations help the children. We all do.



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My experience as a volunteer has been such an eye-opener and has blown apart all of my preconceived notions and expectations of how my contributions are used.



Just like I know that my volunteer work is a spoke in the wheel, I also now realize that, equal to the ARI Holiday Gift Drive, the Prom Wear event, the Summer Camps and most importantly, the crucial services for children and families, donations to fund the every day operations required to run an

organization like electricity, heat, running water and office space are just as imperative to helping these children.

To give visiting children in care a place to come where they will be loved—and find the love and security they deserve.

I've truly come to understand just what the words "non-profit" mean, and how every single penny, just like every single event and every single service provided by ARI, helps to better the lives of Rhode Island's foster children. Thank you for joining me in making sure the wheels keep moving forward.

The Gift of Hope and a Better Future

Your gift to Adoption Rhode Island brings hope and healing to a child in foster care. We need you—and our kids need you. Your contribution makes a difference throughout the adoption journey of a child, teen or family. You bring children and families together and you help a child heal from the pain that comes from not having a forever family to love them. You strengthen the bond between siblings who have been separated and you give a teen a future to believe in. Your impact is a ripple that changes the future for generations.

Forever in our Hearts, and Still Making a Difference

Almost two years ago, ARI lost someone very special in our family with the passing of Judith McSoley. Judy was a fierce and tireless advocate for children in foster care and dedicated her career to their well-being and their futures. Judy's family asked that donations be made in her memory to ARI. So many of the people who she inspired responded, leading to a fund to honor her legacy - the **Judith McSoley Fund**.

Along with the McSoley family, we are excited to announce that because of the fund established in her memory, two young adults who grew up in foster care—now leaders and advocates themselves—recently attended the **Fostering Change Network Foundation's 2018 Alumni Powerhouse Networking Conference** in Baltimore, MD.

Later this summer, Judy's family and ARI will proudly be sharing news of plans to honor her legacy, in a permanent way, that will continue to transform lives for generations to come.



Alumni Powerhouse Ambassadors

Christian and Yolanda met at ARI's offices with our Youth Transitions Team to prepare for their trip to Baltimore. We look forward to learning from their experience and utilizing their expertise to launch a Foster Care Alumni Group to support and advocate for youth in, and aging out of care.



Especially in these times, ARI is proud to stand with the LGBT community. All youth deserve to be loved and cared for—to have a sense of belonging. And, families come in all forms. At our booth at PrideFest18 we shared resources and information about foster care and adoption, and resources to support LGBT youth.



Save the Date!

- **July 18. Give a Child a Summer to Remember!** Finn's Harborside, East Greenwich Fundraiser for Camp and Childhood Experiences. Music, Food, Raffle and Fun.
- **August 12. 3rd Annual Duffle Bag Bash!** Matunuck Community Center, South Kingstown. Family Fun with Food, Games, Music and Children's Activities. Bring a new suitcase or rolling duffle bag or a gift card for a child in foster care.
- **September 17. Tuesday's Child/Arpin Group Golf Classic to benefit Adoption Rhode Island** Rhode Island Country Club, Barrington

Join us. Donate. Sponsor. Change a Life!

To learn more about how to help make a difference, contact: Darlene Allen, Executive Director and CEO - dallen@adoptionri.org or Jennifer Foster, Director of Development and Community Relations - jfoster@adoptionri.org

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