



Children first,
and always.

Welcome to
Adoption Rhode Island's
2018 National Adoption Month
Celebration and Award Ceremony

featuring

Rhode Island's 14th Annual

Heart Gallery

an exhibit of portraits of Rhode Island
children waiting for permanency



Adoption Rhode Island
Children First, and Always.

Help yourself to refreshments near the Bell Area. Please proceed up to the House Chamber Room, 2nd Floor at approximately 5:15. **Note - There is no food allowed in the Chamber Room.** Children are welcome to remain in the Bell Area for activities or sit with the activity packets inside the House Chamber Room during the program.
Children must be accompanied by an adult at all times.

Welcome

Steven Parente, President, Board of Directors - Adoption Rhode Island

Remarks

Office of the Governor

Remarks

Dr. Trista Piccola, Director, RI Department of Children, Youth and Families

Opening of the Program

Darlene Allen, CEO & Executive Director - Adoption Rhode Island

Musical Performance

“The Greatest Love of All”, performed by Willia Burton-Orr, Felicia Petrone and Missy Cupp

Remarks

Judge Lia N. Stuhlsatz

Award Presentations

Advocacy Awards

Senator Lou DiPalma
Representative Deb Ruggiero

Community Partner Awards

CVS Health
Mews Tavern

Above and Beyond Awards

Mike Jackvony
AJ Lee
Jennifer Silva
Lori Edwards
Anne Lebrun-Cournoyer

Friend of Adoption Awards

Jennifer Griffith
Nicole DeCristofaro

Beacon of Hope Awards

Savon Shoes
Michelle Duso

Musical Performance

“Where You Belong” - performed by Jasmine Rabideau

The Heart Gallery

Recognition of Heart Gallery Supporters - Beth Capron

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony & Heart Gallery Viewing

State Room

Advocacy Award

This award honors individuals and organizations whose support and commitment help improve the lives of foster and adopted children, adults and families

Senator Lou DiPalma and Representative Deborah Rugeiro

For the past several years, these two amazing state legislators have worked tirelessly on behalf of foster youth in Rhode Island. They both heard many stories and statistics of former foster youth becoming homeless or forced to exit the child welfare system without an education or a support system. Lou and Deb set out to learn as much as they could about the youth, the system(s) that serve the youth, the outcomes and about strategies to improve the outcomes. They hosted numerous information gathering sessions, participated in rally's, testified in legislative committees, worked with the Governor, the teams at DCYF, the Department of Labor and Training, BHDDH, the Family Court and many community providers. Most importantly, Lou and Deb listened to the youth. They knew that these youth deserved to get support through high school. They also knew that housing and job assistance are crucial to successful transition to adult. They were determined to find a solution that worked for the youth and was fiscally responsible. Both Lou and Deb fought long and hard to change Rhode Island law so that youth have the option to continue to receive support from the DCYF until age 21 rather than leaving care at age 18 without knowing what the future would hold. We would not have the Voluntary Extension of Care without these two legislative voices. We are thrilled to provide each of them with an Advocacy Award.

Above and Beyond Awards

Honoring Social Workers and Administrators from the Dept. of Children, Youth and Families for their distinguished service.

Michael Jackvony and AJ Lee

Captain America and Falcon, Batman and Robin -- just 2 of many iconic dynamic duos our kids look up to, but we're lucky to have a superhero duo in Child Protective Services: Mike Jackvony and AJ Lee of the Special Investigation Unit. Both are retired from the Providence Police Department, however, their interest in working with at risk youth was evident earlier in their careers as Youth Service Bureau detectives. Mike's career with DCYF began four years ago in a position tasked with locating kin. While searching for family members, Mike began to also search for missing youth. AJ joined the unit two years later; however, his involvement with foster youth didn't stop at work. Recognizing the need for supportive adults in the lives of youth involved with the foster care system, AJ became a mentor. 'Above and Beyond' is an understatement to the work that Mike and AJ do. Since the formation of this incredible duo, there has been a dramatic reduction in missing youth. You can count on them to work day and night to reduce the number of youth at-risk and on the streets and to never give up on them. But what truly makes them exceptional, are the relationships they form. They don't just simply return missing youth to placement, they make it a priority to keep in contact with them through visits and phone calls, advocating for placements that meet their needs, accompanying them to meetings or court when they are in need of a supportive adult, attending events hosted by the Teen Focus program, and always being there for the kids when needed. Through their work, they're really changing the way our youth view law enforcement and the child welfare system as a whole, while also keeping them safe.

Jennifer Silva and Lori Edwards

Lori and Jen are Expedited Permanency Meeting Facilitators at the Department of Children, Youth and Families, who are faithful advocates; always embracing permanency for youth. Lori, a DCYF veteran for 25 years and Jen for 18 years, started their venture together, almost three years ago, to help transition youth from congregate care to homes in which they can thrive in a family setting. They believe in and advocate for permanency, and work feverishly behind the scenes to locate natural supports, birth family -- in and out of state, and other connections for youth to have in their lives until a permanent placement is achieved. Lori and Jen's perseverance and hopeful outlook is not only a benefit to the children with whom they work, but also other professionals working with them. Their "never give up energy" is contagious and appreciated as a value engrained in all that they do. Lori and Jen go above and beyond by advocating for children, first and always. We are happy to present to them the Above and Beyond Award.

Anne Lebrun-Cournoyer

Before retiring from DCYF, Anne Lebrun-Cournoyer committed her career to improving the lives of children and families, while also championing for systems' change and improvement, for more than three decades. With a wealth of knowledge across the system, both locally and nationally, Anne pushed for our own system to "think smarter, not harder." When it came to difficult cases, Anne was often the voice of reason, common sense, and compassion. Her dependability, honesty, and willingness to collaborate for the betterment of children's lives helped to bring families together through reunification, adoption, or guardianship. While Adoption RI has already felt her absence since her retirement earlier this year, we wish Anne well in the retirement dreams she is already making a reality. It is with great pleasure we present Anne Lebrun-Cournoyer with Adoption Rhode Island's Above & Beyond Award.

Community Partner Award

An award given to individuals, organizations, businesses and groups who have demonstrated commitment, compassion and vision for waiting children and adoptive families.

CVS Health

CVS Health has a strong commitment to the community and encourages their employees to give back by volunteering. In fact, the employees of CVS give more than a million dollars worth of volunteerism hours annually. CVS Health employees have been active participants in our Holiday Drive, purchasing and wrapping gifts for foster and adopted children, for over 5 years! Last year they fulfilled wish lists for over 70 children - with grateful recipients getting everything on their lists and then some! Attending the CVS wrapping party is like going to Santa's workshop, with everyone pitching in to make sure each present is special. It is truly heartwarming to see the love that goes into the careful choosing of gifts and the desire of this team to make the season a little brighter for children in foster care. It is because of your kindness, continued support and belief every that every child deserves to be happy for the holidays that we present the employees of CVS Health with the Community Partner Award.

Mews Tavern

ARI is proud to recognize iconic South County landmark, Mews Tavern, for our partnership in bringing an entire community – and state – together to make life better for kids in foster care. From the beginning, Mews Tavern’s owners, Danny Rubino and Dave Barnes, and Business Manager, George McAuliffe, have enthusiastically been a part of the annual Duffle Bag Bash in Matunuck. They have been major donors to the event – each year generously providing beer, wine and support, and helping to make the day the fun and successful event it has become. The Mews team helps promote the day and the restaurant serves as a collection point for suitcases—even after the event. Their participation is a big factor in why hundreds of people join us each year—and why thousands of bags, suitcases and gift cards have been collected to make sure no child in foster care in RI ever carries their belongings in a trash bag. Mews Tavern’s commitment to our mission extends year round as they help bring awareness of the beautiful children in foster care waiting for families. During National Adoption Month the Mews raises funds that come back to ARI in support of our programs. There has never been a moment of hesitation when George has been approached with an idea that will benefit kids—in fact, he is always thinking of ways to help more. Our friends at Mews Tavern believe as we do that children come first, always, and we are grateful.

Friend of Adoption Award

This award honors individuals and groups who volunteer their time, talents and resources, often engaging others in their efforts to help support the needs of children in RI foster care.

Jennifer Griffith

Jennifer Griffith was appointed by Governor Gina Raimondo in early 2016, receiving the consent of the Rhode Island State Senate for a five-year term as the Child Advocate for the State of Rhode Island. She is a graduate of the College of the Holy Cross and Roger Williams School of Law and is admitted to practice law in Rhode Island, Massachusetts and the United States Federal District Court of Rhode Island. The Office of the Child Advocate monitors each child open to DCYF, to protect the legal rights of children in State care and to promote policies and practices which ensure that children are safe, that children have permanent and stable families, and that children in out of home placements have their physical, mental, medical, educational, emotional, and behavioral needs met. Since her appointment, Jennifer has worked tirelessly on behalf of Rhode Island’s most vulnerable children. She has been a leader in ensuring that our state works to improve our child protection system, our group care facilities and our training school. She has also been a wonderful collaborator on the Duffle Bag Bash event. Each year children receive duffle bags, gift cards and more because of this important and effective community collaboration. She does not want any child to move from place to place with their belongings in a garbage bag. We are thrilled to provide Jennifer with a, well-deserved, Friend of Adoption Award.

Nicole DeCristofaro

On any given day, you can find CASA social worker, Nicole DeCristofaro in the family court, truancy court, mental health clinic, in the homes of children and their families, and even chaperoning Taylor Swift concerts. While running between all of these places, you will likely find her on the phone coordinating services. She is a tireless advocate in and out of the courtroom. Court can often be intimidating for our youth, however Nicole is a familiar and encouraging presence. She ensures that their voice is heard when important decisions are being made and that their needs are being met. But Nicole's work doesn't stop there -- she has also been an amazing resource for the teens ARI works with on permanency and educational goals. Nicole is always willing to lend a helping hand. Her wealth of knowledge of the court, mental health, and child welfare systems have greatly assisted in the streamlining of necessary services for older youth in care. Her passion for supporting their success is admirable. She is a friend in adoption, for the children and families she serves, and all of those around her who she regularly inspires with her advocacy, compassion, and energy.

Beacon of Hope

This award honors individuals, businesses and others who have a strong commitment to providing hope for children.

Michelle Duso

Michelle Duso is a social entrepreneur, community organizer, and advocate for youth and young adults, who has dedicated her life and her career to supporting young people and the organizations that serve them. As principal and founder of Power4Good and in her role on the Board of Directors at COLAGE, she has been a leader in empowering the LGBTQ community and cultivating the leadership abilities of all those with whom she works. Michelle has a special place in her heart for former foster youth and is a great partner with Adoption Rhode Island's Youth Transition Services in our efforts to prevent our kids from experiencing homelessness after aging out of care. She is the founder of Home to Hope, a youth-led street outreach program supporting LGBTQ+ youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in Rhode Island. She was instrumental in the creation of an Unaccompanied Youth Committee of the Rhode Island Continuum of Care, which has been working to create the state's first Plan to End Youth Homelessness. What makes Michelle's work unique is her ability to bring people together around a common cause, whether or not they've ever been around the same table. She is a powerful leader who is tireless in her efforts, and makes everyone who works with her feel appreciated and important. She does all this while raising a family and as an active runner in the We Run this Town running group.

Savon Shoes

David and Louis Grande are the owners of Savon Shoes, a family owned and operated business with locations in North Providence, Warren, and formerly Pawtucket, for over 35 years. The Grande's have remained committed to the community for the past 3 decades, as they have a strong focus on hiring youth, providing quality in-home fitting services to elderly, and donating to those in need. When David and Louis Grande were seeking help for their annual tent sale, they immediately contacted ARI's Teen Focus program. Having previously talked to a member of Teen Focus about the program, David and Louis understood that teenagers in RI state care needed an opportunity to prove that they could succeed. In addition to providing employment to multiple youth, David and Louis have a great understanding of the many barriers that young adults in state care have to face. When one of the employed youth expressed interest in applying to a business program, David offered to show him the in's and out's of business management. When another youth needed a ride for his shift, David was there to pick him up from his apartment with a morning coffee. When yet another youth was working an 8-hour shift and didn't have lunch, David bought him a sandwich and gave him a gift card for groceries. When still another teen struggled with anxiety and mental health, David offered a listening ear. Among many other things, David and Louis Grande provided HOPE to youth in the Teen Focus program. Hope that they could be successful, that they had relevant skills, that they could fit in...and most importantly, hope that they have worth! Thank you David and Louis for providing hope to youth and young adults!

*Congratulations to all and thank you
for your continued support!*

*14th Annual
Heart Gallery Children*

Aaliyah
Alexis
Alyssa
Anthony
Demetris
Deztiny

Ethan
Hector
Jahvon
Jasmine
Seth

Featured Families

The O'Connor Family
The Sylvia Family

Heart Gallery Photographers

Lisa Bushee Photography
Gene Hutnak Photography
Joni's Photography
Keith Jochim Photo
Diane Miller Photography
Oggi Photo, Julie Brigidi
Options Photography
Sabrina Scolari Photography
Laura Vaillancourt Photography

3D Virtual Heart Gallery

Innovative Visuals - Doug Fingliss and Laura Vaillancourt

**Heart Gallery portraits and booklets printed courtesy of
Printmakers, Inc., Pawtucket, RI**