



PRESS RELEASE

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May is National Foster Care Awareness Month

Maryland's Human Services Agency Celebrates by Fostering Faith, Hope and Love

Allegany, Garrett & Washington Counties (May 20, 2016) — State child welfare professionals are implementing family centered focus strategies to enhance the child welfare service delivery as it relates to Maryland's Foster Care Program. Children placed in the care of the state are faring better because of the type of services they are receiving. As a result of abuse and neglect, children must be removed from their homes. In Maryland, we are fortunate to have caring citizens who make a difference in young lives by welcoming them into their hearts, lives and home making them feel safe and protected. "It's the quality of care that is making the real difference in the lives of these children," said Governor Hogan.

May is Foster Care Awareness month. It is a time to reflect on the needs of our children and to ensure that they have a safe place to call home. In Maryland, we are taking time out to recognize some of the outstanding citizens who are providing safety and wellbeing during such a critical time in their lives. "When a child needs protection, we intervene with a plan of safety and ongoing security," said DHR Secretary Sam Malhotra. "Our foster homes provide a safe nurturing environment for children in need of stability during a traumatic time."

The DHR child welfare professionals are taking time to recognize those unsung heroes who step up in defense of children and have identified foster parents from around the state who has gone beyond answering the call for help.

On Sunday May 22, 2016 Foster Parents **Sonya & Jason Merritt** will be recognized for over 8 years of service to the citizens of **Allegany County**. They became licensed foster/adoptive parents in 2009. Since becoming foster parents they have had 14 placements and adopted one child. They have continued relationships with the children whom have been in their home as well. In addition to their continued commitment to children, the Merritts are a great support to foster families in Allegany County. Mrs. Merritt assists new foster parents and commits to being a phone call away from those foster parents would need some extra support during placements. They have also been an active recruiter for new foster families in Allegany and surrounding counties.

The Maryland Department of Human Resources protects the State's vulnerable children and adults and provides temporary economic assistance. DHR strengthens Maryland families and improves communities through its 24 Departments of Social Services, community partnerships and its four administrations: the Social Services Administration, Family Investment Administration and Child Support Enforcement Administration.

- Larry Hogan, Governor
- Boyd k. Rutherford , Lt. Governor
- Sam Malhotra, Secretary

In **Garrett County**, Foster Parents **Viola and Buster Orendorf** became licensed foster parents in 2014. They initially wanted to provide respite care to children that were placed in their home. In December 2015, the family accepted their first fulltime placement. They opened their home close to Christmas (usually an extremely difficult time for the children) The Orendorf's very graciously invited the biological parents to spend Christmas with them. This gesture facilitated an exchange that ensured that the family was able to visit over the holidays.

As foster parents, Viola and Buster attend training focused on enhancing foster parent and biological parent relationships in an effort to make foster care less traumatic on the children. This family has truly embraced the goals of the program to stabilize and reunite families whenever possible. They have created a photo album that includes pictures of their biological family that they review with the child on a regular basis.

In **Washington County**, **William and Earleen Smith** who have over four years of service to the county. They have been licensed resource parents since 2012 have three biological children and four children placed in their home. The family is sometimes asked to serve as guest speakers during trainings and other special events. The Smith's are always available to offer support and encouragement to birth families through very challenging and emotional situations. The family was able to adopt the children on June 4, 2015 and a post adoption agreement was developed with the mother and an Aunt to ensure a continuous relationship with the children. The Smith's are now fostering twin baby boys.

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