

Thursday, June 19 2014

Parents Who Open Their Hearts and Homes Recognized at Annual Foster Parent Appreciation Reception

FORT LAUDERDALE, FL – The annual Foster Parent Appreciation Reception was held recently at Events by Grateful Palate in Fort Lauderdale. Hosted by ChildNet, the Community-Based Care (CBC) lead agency in Broward and Palm Beach counties, the event was an opportunity for Broward County's foster care agencies to honor outstanding foster families who open their hearts and homes to children in care.

The reception drew foster parents, child welfare administrators and staff for hors d'oeuvres, awards and raffle prizes. To symbolize the ongoing efforts of foster parents in the community who brighten the lives of children in care, 'You Are My Sunshine' was this year's theme.



(L to R): Tom Lukasik, 4KIDS of South Florida vice president - community engagement; and Stephen Kepper, Foster Parent of the Year award recipient.

ChildNet President and CEO Emilio Benitez kicked off the event, delivering opening remarks with a heartfelt thank you to parents for their enduring support of Broward County's foster youth, and also shared his story about his own personal experience with the child welfare system.

"Tonight's event is only a small tribute compared with the tremendous care and compassion you provide for the children most in need of love, but it is an important cause for celebration," said Benitez. "Our system works because of the strength of this community, and we are truly grateful for each and every one of you who helps provide loving homes for children, like my father, who have ended up in foster care due to abuse, abandonment or neglect."

Also in attendance were child advocates from foster home management agencies, including 4KIDS of South Florida, Camelot Community Care, Florida Baptist Children's Home, Choices Children & Families Consortium, KID, Mount Bethel Human Services, His House Children's Home, National Youth Advocate Program, Devereux Florida, The Twelve and National Mentor Health Care, Inc.

Agencies nominated foster parents who have excelled in their foster parenting roles to receive Foster Parent of the Year awards, presented during the reception by Wendy Smith, ChildNet director of foster home recruitment & quality. Anne and Mike Davis, Plantation residents, were among recipients recognized with this special award. The Davis' have been foster parenting for 23 years, having cared for 129 babies. As CMS foster parents with Children's Home Society, the couple currently cares for a medical needs baby, taking the child to numerous weekly doctors' appointments and to ChildNet every week for supervised visits with his mother.

Melissa and Stephen Kepper of Pembroke Pines also were recipients of the Foster Parent of the Year award. The Kepper's, who have been foster parents since 2009, work hard to support reunification efforts for all children placed in their home, including a sibling group that they wanted to keep together. The couple is truly committed to the children they feel called to serve, and they continue to maintain a home that is loving and supportive to the children placed there.

Norma and Hilton Hendy of Miramar also were recipients of the Foster Parent of the Year award. Involved with Florida Mentor since 2002, the Hendy's have helped more than 15 children in their home, many of whom have had severe behavioral difficulties and experienced trauma. The couple's loving and consistent approach proved time after time to be the right combination to break down the boundaries preventing therapeutic progress, and they consider each child placed in their care as family.

"Foster Parent of the Year awards were given to these incredible foster parents, as they continually embody the tireless efforts on behalf of the community, serving the community's most vulnerable children by opening their hearts and homes," said Smith. "They are excellent role models for foster families around the world."

As the lead agency in Broward and Palm Beach counties and single private non-profit entity responsible for administration of the local child welfare system, ChildNet brings years of dedication to protecting abused, abandoned and neglected children in the communities it serves.

For more information about becoming a foster parent, please contact ChildNet in Broward County at 954-414-6001. Visit www.ChildNet.us and www.facebook.com/ChildNet.

ABOUT CHILDNET:

ChildNet has been chosen by the Florida Department of Children & Families to serve as the Community Based Care (CBC) lead agency in both Broward and Palm Beach counties. As such, it is the single private non-profit entity responsible for administration of the local child welfare systems in each county. It fulfills this responsibility by managing comprehensive networks of child welfare services providers and, in Broward, by also serving as the single centralized child welfare case management provider. The agency's mission is to protect abused, abandoned and neglected children in the communities it serves. Fulfillment of this mission requires constant input and support from community stakeholders and service providers.