

Parents who open their hearts and homes recognized at annual Foster Parent Appreciation Reception

Broward County residents named Foster Parents of the Year



L to r: Kristoff Wright; foster parent Camille Flagler, Mount Bethel Human Services; Saeka Paul; Mishaela Harris, Mount Bethel Human Services.

BROWARD COUNTY, 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 fami-

lies 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.

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.

June 26, 2014

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