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## **Embrace a life and foster a child**

***Arapahoe County recognizes foster parents during Foster Care Month for their commitment to children***

**Aurora, Colo. ---** A young child battling schizophrenia spent his earliest years in what most people would call unlivable conditions. His home was filled with dirty diapers, overflowing garbage, cockroaches, spider webs and cat feces. In fact it was the stench coming out of the home that caught authorities' attention.

The Arapahoe County Department of Human Services was notified and to protect his safety and wellbeing he was placed in foster care. A woman, let's call her Cheryl to protect her confidentiality, volunteered to welcome him into her home while the County worked to either safely reunite him with his parents (once they completed their requirements) or establish an other lifelong family relationship.

Cheryl is an advocate for children. It's not her job; it's her passion. She strives for all children to feel wanted and "normal." This little boy struggled with poor peer relations, social skills and a basic uncoordination that left him unable to play with others. Cheryl immediately set to work to help him in these areas and with quiet patience she introduced him to other members of his new family and invited him to participate in activities. He now enjoys skateboarding, riding horses and taking family bike trips.

Cheryl is in constant communication with teachers and therapists to make sure he receives the best possible care and support. She works closely with his extended family to create strong healthy relationships. And when he finds his adoptive family, she will promise to keep in touch because she knows children need to know they are loved, and then she will prepare to help the next child in need.

Hundreds of children in Arapahoe County are found living in abused and neglected situations, and there are every day people, like Cheryl, with extraordinary hearts who volunteer to take these sad, hurt or troubled children in.

Foster parents open their homes to strangers, lonely children who have been let down by their biological parents or custodians. They accept the hard road these kids may be traveling on and they are willing to love them unconditionally. These adults are the heroes who live next door, that you meet at school or in the grocery store. They may not look any different at first but if you peer a little closer you may see that twinkle in their eye that shows they are making a positive impact in a child's life.

May is National Foster Care Month. Throughout the month, Arapahoe County will join thousands of communities across the country to celebrate the loving, caring adults who are making a positive difference

in the lives of children and youth in foster care. As part of the Foster Care Month celebration, Arapahoe County will engage in a variety of special activities that recognize our foster parents for their dedication and care.

“I have so much respect and admiration for foster parents,” said Angela Lytle, Children, Youth and Family Services Manager. “Foster care is such hard work and the rewards can be incredible.”

The caring commitment of foster parents is critical for ending the cycles of neglect, abuse and other family crisis issues that often prevent a child from reaching his or her full potential. Like all young people, youth in foster care deserve and benefit from enduring, positive relationships with caring adults. Now is the time to get involved.

The County hosts an orientation each month for anyone interested in joining the Arapahoe County Embrace a Life program. The orientation is free and begins on the first Tuesday of every month. If you would like to become a foster parent, call 303-636-1KID for more information.

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