



NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH 2016 WEBINAR *Talking With Older Youth About Adoption*

PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES

Thomas McRae, Jr.
Philadelphia, PA



Thomas entered the foster care system in 2004 after just turning 11. During his 6 years in care, he lived in 11 foster homes. Some, he says, were just not a good fit. In others, families could simply not cope with his admittedly challenging behavior. Thomas was about to be turned out of yet another foster home and placed in a group home when he called his mother's friend and asked if she would consider adopting him. She immediately said "yes" and started taking the training and other steps necessary to become his mother. Since that day, there have been many other meaningful milestones for Thomas. In 2013, he spent a summer as an intern with the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute's Foster Youth Internship Program in Washington, DC. He has also volunteered as an advocate and spokesperson with a local youth-serving organization, and is an active member of the AdoptUSKids Speaker's Bureau. Thomas says that, by telling his story, he hopes to inspire young people in foster care who may feel helpless or alone and encourage adults to get involved and make a difference in the life of a child or teen. Thomas is eager to do what he can to provide that guidance to future generations of children in foster care. He has a new job working with foster youth at an agency in Philadelphia and is currently enrolled in the master's of social work program at the University Of Maryland School Of Social Work

Ashley Garcia
Concord, NC



Ashley's foster care experience began at the age of 12. She describes her time in foster care as "scary," but believes the experience played a role in defining who she is today. Although it was not an easy road, her foster care experience taught her to be strong and independent. Ashley met her mom, Liz, at a Friendly's restaurant in January 2012. She remembers being extremely nervous and thinking, "Who is this woman who is willing to adopt a freshman in high school?" However, something deep inside told her, "She might be the one." Following that first meeting they "dated" for about 6 weeks before Ashley moved into her new home with Liz. On National Adoption Day 2012, Ashley was adopted at the age of 16 and describes it as, "the happiest day of my life." Adoption has changed Ashley's life. She said, "I have someone who loves and supports me unconditionally, and a forever home. My mom is my best friend. I know I can tell her anything because she will listen. She may not always be happy with the choices that I make but she is there for me. She lets me learn from my mistakes."

Stacey Hudson Padova

Alexandria, VA



Stacy and her husband, Fulvio, have been resource parents for the City of Alexandria, VA, since 2011. Six months after welcoming their first teenage boy into their home, he was returned to his birth parents. The "bridging the gap" work done on this particular case awarded them the 2013 Foster Parents of the Year for the City of Alexandria. Having a teenage daughter in the house who enjoyed being the younger sister, Stacey and Fulvio decided to adopt an older child. On February 14, 2013, they became the proud parents of an 18-year-old son they met at a match party. Since then, they've provided a home to two additional teenage boys. While the boys no longer reside with them, they continue to remain connected and involved in their lives.

Stacey enjoys giving back to her community by being a member of the Citizens Emergency Response Team (CERT), an Alexandria resource parent, and an active member of the AdoptUSKids Speaker's Bureau. Being an 8-year gynecologic cancer survivor, she also serves on the race committee for the National Race to End Women's Cancer. Recently, her company, in partnership with their partners Ironistic, cohosted the 9th annual Run!Geek!Run! 5K benefitting a local charity.

Stacey hopes, by telling her story, others will open their minds to assisting young adults find their way and a place to call home—forever.

Anni Keane

New York City, NY



Anni Keane is a foster care alumna who has worked in the foster care system for over 13 years. She is a fierce advocate for youth and has touched the lives of hundreds of youth in care through her direct service and advocacy work on their behalf. Anni is the Director of You Gotta Believe's *Nobody Ages Out Youth Movement*. In this capacity, she leads the core group of alumni Advocates for Youth who are all working to change the system with a laser focus on permanency. Using their personal stories, the team advocates with public officials and child welfare leaders, works directly with young people in care, delivers workshops to youth and caseworkers, and facilitates all foster/adoptive parent training. Anni spent time in the foster care system during her childhood, was placed into her permanent family at 17, and chose to be legally adopted at 24. She has been sharing her story publicly for many years on a local and national level, including as a panelist at a U.S. Senate Caucus on Foster Youth and Homelessness. She is a powerful speaker and a source of ongoing support and inspiration to her team and to youth throughout the child welfare system.



The Children's Bureau, within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, funds the National Adoption Month initiative each November through a partnership with AdoptUSKids and Child Welfare Information Gateway.