

Inside This Issue

- [Welcome New... Providers](#)
- [Celebrating Reunification: Mikala's Story](#)
- [MN ADOPT Podcasts](#)
- [Fare for All](#)
- [Foster Parents Needed!](#)
- [Mentoring for Foster Parents](#)
- [Child Foster Care Training](#)
- [Fall Family Fun](#)

Licensing Unit's Mission

To enrich the lives of children and adults by promoting safe and quality licensed care.



Child Foster Care
Licensing
14949 62nd Street N.
Stillwater, MN 55082

Child Passenger Restraint Systems (CARS) Training Update

In spring 2020, the Commissioner of Human Services temporarily modified certain requirements for licensed child foster care in order to give providers more flexibility to operate in a pandemic and focus on critical health and safety measures. This included the waiving of in-person CARS trainings. With the end of the peacetime emergency this summer came the end of these temporary modifications. *As of August 31, all foster care providers must return to full compliance with the CARS training requirements.*

CARS training is required for all foster care providers caring for children under the age of eight. Individuals who need to take initial CARS training or who need to renew CARS training must complete an in-person training according to the timelines below:

- **If you completed the online CARS training during the COVID-19 peacetime emergency:** you must complete an in-person CARS training by your next license renewal or December 31, 2021, whichever date is later.
- **If you are an existing license holder whose CARS training expired during the COVID-19 peacetime emergency:** you must complete an in-person CARS training by your next license renewal or December 31, 2021, whichever date is later.
- ***If you are a relative or kinship provider:** contact your licenser for more information about a variance option for the CARS training requirement.

Continued on page 2

Welcome Our New Case Aide!

Tamara Sparrow is the new case aide for the Licensing Unit. She will be supporting our unit in many ways, including handling all foster care placement requests. The next time you receive a placement call, please give her a warm welcome!



Hello! My name is Tamara Sparrow, and I am the new Case Aide for the Washington County Licensing Unit. I started with Washington County in 2019 supporting the front desk and then the Child Protection Unit. Most recently, I was the Office Support Supervisor for the Office Support Team.

My family lives in Stillwater; we have two girls, 11 and 9, and a 6-year-old boy. We spend much of our time hiking, boating, and watching movies together. I am excited about this opportunity and look forward to supporting you in my new role!

Welcome New Child Foster Care Providers

August 2021

- **Sue Gramenz & Terry Vanderveer,** Bayport (Kin)
- **Jewel Larson,** Stillwater (Kin)
- **Kathy Quale,** St. Paul Park (Kin)
- **Ashley Schwintek & Joseph Prokop,** Cottage Grove (Kin)

September 2021

- **Rick & Nancy Hancks,** Woodbury (Kin)
- **Linda & Mike Laverty,** Forest Lake (Kin)
- **Shelli & Jim Matheson,** Forest Lake (Kin)
- **Tracy McGrorty,** Stillwater (Non-Kin)
- **Lisa & Greg Richert,** Forest Lake (Kin)
- **Alyssa Rosas,** Oakdale (Non-Kin)

MN ADOPT Podcasts

Calling all podcast lovers! MN ADOPT now offers a bimonthly podcast, called *Let's Talk*, filled with valuable resources for prospective and current foster and adoptive families. New episodes are available every other

Continued on page 3

Continued from CARS Training Update on page 1

The licensing unit emailed all foster care providers on September 15 with a schedule of CARS trainings being offered by Public Health this fall. **Please register early, as class size is limited to 15 participants.** *Participants must wear a mask, and if they have any symptoms of illness or have been exposed to someone who has tested positive, they need to reschedule to a different date.* To register, email ComSvsCCLicensing@co.washington.mn.us.

Date/Time: Monday, November 8 OR Monday, December 6 • 6-9 p.m.

Location: Stillwater Government Center - Cafeteria

Contact your licensor if you have any questions about the CARS training requirements or are having difficulty finding a training.

Celebrating Reunification: Mikala's Story

Mikala has an open, expansive presence; she speaks with an unflinching frankness that reveals the stark realities and emotion-laden events that led her to this point in her life. Three years ago, Mikala found herself in a dark place – physically, mentally, and emotionally – entrenched in a cycle of substance abuse and domestic violence that led to the removal of her children Aviannah and Ambria, then ages three and one, by Child Protective Services into out-of-home placement. “My rock bottom was my kids getting taken away from me,” she states soberly. “I was literally losing everything and hitting that rock bottom.”

Leah and Kyle, parents to four biological children of their own, were relatively new to fostering, with one previous placement, when they got the call from Carole, a Carver County child protection social worker. Leah recalls, “[Carole said] ‘I have this amazing young woman and her kids need to come into care. She is so sad, and she's had a lot of really hard things happen in her life, but honestly, I think this is the hardest thing that she has ever gone through. Are you willing to meet her and have her kids come with you and stay with you?’”

Ultimately, all of their lives intersected in a life-altering meeting in a parking lot. “That’s a hard day to think about without crying,” remembers Leah. “Bria was sleeping, and we transferred her in the car, and Avi [had her] eyes wide open, just staring. Now that I understand fight, flight, or freeze, she was definitely in freeze mode.” For Mikala, the pain was unimaginable. “I remember I cried outside of the car so they wouldn't see me cry,” she says. “I got down on their level and I just explained to them, ‘You're going to go here for right now, but you're going to be really taken care of and you call mommy at any time.’ And everything was going to be OK.”

In retrospect, Leah reflects, Carole’s kindness and compassion set the tone for the seeding of a positive relationship between Mikala and Leah and Kyle from the outset, with the children at its center. “It makes sense to start relationships early,” she affirms. “It felt so right for something that felt so wrong.” Mikala agrees, crediting this nascent relationship

Continued on page 3

Continued from Celebrating Reunification: Mikala's Story on page 2

with allowing her to willingly release her children into the care of Leah and Kyle.

"The moment I saw them, they reassured me that they were going to take really good care of my kids. And I just let them go because something was telling me my kids are in a good place." Echoes Angie, a Carver County foster care social worker, "What you did in that parking lot that day and meeting each other is an example I have used time and time again because it is the prime example of what we want to see happen. It is the best when birthparent and foster parent can meet right away to establish that connection."

This was, according to Leah, very much a reciprocal relationship from the beginning, one that began in that bleak moment of transfer in the parking lot with Mikala making the decision to entrust Leah and Kyle with the girls' care, followed by a willingness to allow the girls the freedom to form attachments with Leah and her family. "She let them love us," she says simply. "That's putting the girls first." Says Lynn, a Carver County child protection social worker, "Attachment is a positive thing – it's a positive for the girls to have other adults they can trust, and you (as a biological parent) can trust if you ever needed them."

And while the girls were in care, Leah made sure that Mikala was an integral part of the girls' lives, recording and sharing milestone moments with her. At a certain point, Leah suggested that Mikala start visiting the girls in their home - a natural progression of the relationship they had established, and one that was best for the girls. "The kids were just wanting to intertwine their lives," states Leah. "Avi just got so much comfort when she saw Mikala and I talking. She loved that because our two worlds were coming together." Adds Mikala, "We always work together. We were always on the same page." These exchanges exemplified the notion that shared parenting supports reunification, which, according to Lynn, was always the goal.

For Mikala, it was a hard-fought goal. "I didn't really know my self-worth; I didn't think I was worthy of anything. I struggled with believing I was a good mom because of what happened. My willingness to fight and just working with everyone – that's what brought my kids home," she asserts. "It's just not giving up and just doing. I had to do so much from the time I woke up to the time I went to sleep. I was always doing something to bring those girls home, whether it was visits, support groups, then treatment." In the midst of it all, she also started college, with support from Leah.

Despite the monumental struggle, Mikala, for her part, is "very grateful for this experience." She elaborates, "When you are in the situation, you want to hide from everybody and I was forced to let it out because it was the only way I was going to get them back home. It was scary because it was up and down. They were at permanency and we discussed permanent options; I even had them tell me 'You are not going to get your kids back. You exceeded your time.' And I said, 'I am going to get them back.' And it happened."

Her hard work paid off. Now reunified with Aviannah and Ambria – and with the latest addition to the family, one-year-old Heaven Lee – Mikala is ready to share her story in the hope that it may help others see that successful, relationship-based non-relative placement can happen, with a "village" of support working together towards a common goal of reunification. Says Leah, "Mikala's story is just so awesome and her willingness to want

Continued on page 4

*Continued from
MN ADOPT Podcasts
on page 2*

Wednesday via
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[www.mnadopt.org/
about/podcasts](http://www.mnadopt.org/about/podcasts).

Podcast episodes can
count towards your
annual training hours
for licensing.

Fare for All

Fare for All is a non-profit, community-supported food group. They buy fresh fruit, vegetables, and meat in bulk to save you 30-40% off grocery store prices.

This group is open to ALL! *No pre-ordering or pre-registration.*

Credit, debit, or EBT payments preferred; cash accepted.
No checks.

For more information, call 763-450-3880 or visit the Fare for All website: <https://fareforall.thefoodgroupmn.org>

Find them on Facebook: facebook.com/fareforall

Foster Parents Needed!

Word of mouth is one of the best forms of recruitment to get new foster parents in Washington County. If anyone has said to you, "I've always thought about becoming a foster parent" or you know of someone who is good with kids, wants to help the community, and you think has what it takes to become a foster parent, please send them our way! We need people who can provide care to a variety of youth, such as teens, sibling groups, children with mental health diagnoses, developmental disabilities, and everything in between. We need foster parents in all areas of the county. Whether families can only commit to one or two weekends per month for respite care or be a placement resource, we have a need for both! Please pass the word on so we can keep kids in our local foster homes.

Our next Child Foster Care Info. Meeting:

**Thurs., November 4
6-8 p.m.**

Webex (online)

For more information, call 651-430-8307.

Continued from Celebrating Reunification: Mikala's Story on page 3

to help other people. Watching things go from the darkness into the light and how beautiful it is when you just own it – I'm just so happy that she's in a healthy enough spot to be wanting to share her story to help other people, because that's what we're here for, right? Our lives are not ours to live alone. And we love her girls." Adds Mikala, "Complete strangers is how we got through this. Those are your kids, too."

To Mikala and her girls, Leah, Kyle, and their kids have evolved from complete strangers to an extension of family, due to a relationship and network of support that has continued post-reunification. As social worker Angie describes Leah and Kyle's interaction with Mikala, "You still talk, you still see the kids, you still work together with those girls. It didn't stop. You have an ongoing relationship and that's another part of why the reunification is successful – because that support continues." And according to Mikala's daughter Aviannah, this continuing relationship is a natural part of her family story. "It's fun when we go to Leah's house with my mom," she says. "We have fun."

Now that the girls have been reunified with Mikala, Leah reflects on how the experience changed her, as well as offering some advice for other foster parents. "Be open to the relationships with the families," she says. "I am more willing to be uncomfortable than I was before, and I understand that a little bit of 'uncomfortable' can lead to something really beautiful on the other side. I didn't realize how much you really champion for them, and the relationships that you make afterwards are just really neat. And that was a total gift."

Mikala's parting words of advice to other parents struggling with out-of-home care carry the weight of one who has lived through the experience and made it successfully to the other side. "From my perspective, being the parent, I would just let them know that everyone is here to help you and they're not against you. Remember to always think about the children, because this is where it all comes to play, and the huge priority is the children's safety and getting them home. Accept that you made a mistake - everyone does - but you just really have to think about your kids and what's best for them. And that's everyone being on the same page, getting along, and coming together to bring them home."

Originally posted on QPI-MN www.qpimn.org/mikala

Mentoring for Foster Parents

Foster care is hard work! We acknowledge the complexities and challenges of parenting children with trauma histories, navigating birthparent relationships, maintaining compliance with licensing regulations, and taking care of your family's day-to-day needs can be overwhelming and may cause you to feel isolated. Washington County is fortunate to have many providers with years of foster care experience who are willing to serve as mentors for those who are newer to this experience. Mentorship could range from a one-time phone call to ongoing contact and support. If you are interested in connecting with a mentor, please contact your licensor.

Child Foster Care Training

DISCLAIMER: In preparation of this newsletter, every effort has been made to offer the most current, correct, and clearly expressed information possible. Nevertheless, inadvertent errors in information may occur. For training information, please check the sponsor listing to be certain of all the details related to the training.

***Reimbursement Reminder:** Foster parents can seek up to \$100 training reimbursement per calendar year per household.

***Training Reminder:** 12 hours of training is required yearly. (13 hours is required within your first year of licensure.) This needs to include one hour on each of the following topics: children's mental health, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), and cultural competency.

UPCOMING TRAININGS

The Impact of COVID on Children's Mental Health

This workshop will provide information on how COVID has impacted the mental health of children and adolescents. It will also provide information on how COVID has impacted parents. Specific clinical examples will be provided and techniques to help support children through this difficult time/transition will also be provided.

Date/Time: Tuesday, October 19 • 10-11:30 a.m.

Location: Online webinar

Cost: \$18

Registration: <https://education.mnadopt.org/v2/?c=event&id=1934>

Birth Family Dynamics in Fostering

Being a foster parent comes with its many challenges and success stories. One of the more powerful components of being a foster parent is the area of birth family dynamics. In this training we will explore common struggles in birth family dynamics as well as tools to help improve the well-being of your home and the children coming into foster care placement.

Date/Time: Thursday, October 28 • 6-8 p.m.

Location: Online webinar

Cost: FREE

Registration: <https://education.mnadopt.org/v2/?c=event&id=1918>

The Couple Check-Up: Keeping Relationships Strong in the Adoption and Fostering Journey

Led by a husband and wife, licensed professional counselor team, who are also adoptive parents, this session explores how to cultivate connection and

increase relational elasticity, while caring for children from traumatic pasts. This is candid training regarding the turbulence of communication, conflict resolution, intimacy, and relationships as they intersect with caring for children with trauma histories. Speakers will coach on ways couples can learn how to build on strengths, creatively address differences, and work together for the best interests of their relationship, which in turn is the best present we can ever give to children who desperately need a safe environment to heal and grow.

- **Part 1:** Isolation is the number-one problem facing marriages and relationships. Training will uncover the threats of isolation and take a deep-dive into the relational stressors that can occur throughout the adoption and fostering journey. Training will lay the foundation and underscore the importance of having intentional strategies in place to strengthen the potential for success for couples who choose the road of fostering and adoption.
- **Part 2:** Training will provide participants with workable strategies and hands-on exercises and interventions for keeping relationships vital and intimate in the headwinds of turbulence.

Date/Time:

Part 1: Tuesday, November 30 • 6-7:30 p.m.

Part 2: Tuesday, December 7 • 6-7:30 p.m.

Location: Online webinar

Cost: FREE

Registration: <https://education.mnadopt.org/v2/?c=tickets&id=1938>

Supporting Children in Care through the Holidays

The holidays can be a particularly difficult time of year for children currently or previously involved with the child welfare system, as this time of year may include complex emotions and behaviors for these children. This webinar will focus on giving caregivers and professionals specific tips and tools that can be used to help children successfully navigate the holiday season.

Date/Time: Wednesday, December 1 • 1-2 p.m.

Location: Online webinar

Cost: \$18

Registration: <https://education.mnadopt.org/v2/?c=tickets&id=1933>

Fall Family Fun

Costumes, pumpkins, and candy – oh my! Check out these family-friendly fall events happening around the county!

Halloween Hoopla

Come dressed in your best costume for an afternoon of family fun! Children will search for a mini pumpkins to decorate, trick-or-treat at various stations, make a craft, and play Halloween games. Those who choose to wear costumes may win prizes from the secret judge! Plus, strike your spookiest pose in the photo booth. This event is open-house style; activities will be cleaned up at 5 p.m. *Recommended for ages 3-12.*

Date/Time: Saturday, October 23 • 3-5 p.m.

Location: Ojibway Park, 2695 Ojibway Drive, Woodbury

Cost: \$10 per child (*only children need to register*)

For more information: www.woodburymn.gov/departments/recreation/special_events.php

Pumpkin Carving Contest

This Pumpkin Carving Contest is open to families or individuals of all ages/skill levels. *All entries must be family-friendly.* The pumpkins will be displayed at the Flashlight Pumpkin Hunt and attendees will vote for the winners. Prizes will be awarded to winners in each of three categories; Best, Spookiest, and Bumpkin Pumpkin (entry by ages 12 and under). Win a \$25 Target gift card!

Drop off your pumpkin: During the Discovery Center's open hours October 24-27

Location: Discovery Center, 4444 Hadley Ave. N, Oakdale

For more information, visit: www.ci.oakdale.mn.us/729/Pumpkin-Carving-Contest

Flashlight Pumpkin Hunt

Search for pumpkins under the stars in the Oakdale Nature Preserve! After the hunt, enjoy chilling refreshments, family DJ, bonfire, spooky entertainment, and ghoulish games. Costumes are optional; *don't forget your flashlight!* All participants receive a glow necklace upon check-in!

Date/Time: Thursday, October 28 • 7-8:30 p.m.

Location: Discovery Center, 4444 Hadley Ave. N, Oakdale

Cost: \$12 per child (*parents attend for free*)

Registration: September 7-October 21 / Online at: https://apm.activecommunities.com/oakdalemn/Activity_Search/flashlight-pumpkin-hunt/2084

Pumpkin Chuckin' Party

Join the Parks and Rec Team for the first ever pumpkin chuck! Bring your pumpkins as we toss, roll, and jump them down the top of the hill! Can your carving survive the bumps and jumps? Come costumed! Get candy!

Date/Time: Monday, November 1 • 4:30-5:30 p.m.

Location: Peter Thompson Park, 6327 Highland Hills Blvd. S, Cottage Grove

Cost: FREE

For more information, visit: <https://discovercottagegrove.com/event/pumpkin-chuckin-party/>

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