

MAFF NEWS

MAFF IN ACTION

RETURN TO SCHOOL

Return to school often brings a sense of excitement and anticipation. What will the new school year be like? Will the children in my care do well? Will the school provide the services they need? Unfortunately, returning to school is going to look pretty different this year. Our excitement has been replaced by anxiety and uncertainty. We're asking new and difficult questions, like: will my child be safe? What will school look like? We are struggling with a number of difficult pieces that this pandemic has brought on, such as financial distress, balancing work and children at home, mood changes and increased anxiety, and the ongoing inequities impacting our families and communities.



MAFF has been diligently reaching out and connecting with fellow Foster, Kinship, Adoptive, and Guardianship caregivers throughout the Commonwealth to get a better understanding of your experience with return to school for the children in

your home. We hear you. We understand your fears and concerns.

Our MAFF reps, alongside our partners at MSPCC's Kid's Net program, have been regularly communicating with leadership at the Department of Children and Families (DCF). We take our role of advocating on your behalf, voicing your concerns, and working with DCF to provide you information and transparency very seriously. While MAFF does not have a role in creating guidelines for return to school for DCF-Involved children, we can ensure that your input is heard and considered.

ONLINE RESOURCES

We can also help ensure that you have the information you need to navigate the challenges ahead by being a source for guidance, tools and supports to facilitate your family's transition back to school, whether it is held remotely, in-person, or a hybrid of the two.

We have compiled and will continue to update resources all geared towards supporting your family's successful transition back to school.

Please visit www.mspcc.org/return-to-school to see our full list.

KID'S NET

MSPCC's Kid's Net team is also here to help. If you have a question or issue, please don't hesitate to email kidsnet@mspcc.org. The Kid's Net Program supports DCF-involved children and the adults who care for them by providing information and assistance. They are available to answer your questions, connect you with fellow foster families, and guide you to services and resources. Find your region's Kid's Net Director at mspcc.org/kidsnet.

This year will be unique, and at times it will no doubt be hard. But there is no stronger group of parents in the world than foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers. But you are not alone. If you need anything, we're here to help. You've got this and we've got you.



MAFF Representative Spotlight

JUANITA GRANT, PARK STREET



I am the oldest of 8 children, four from mom, and four from dad. I am a single parent of 24 and 26-year-old young men who have had the pleasure to meet many different brothers and sisters who have come through our home. At the age of 16, I joined a youth organization called Wiping Out Drug Abuse, Inc. (WODA). The founder became my mentor and was very supportive and encouraging. I became the Youth Director at the age of 18. When I was in middle school, I was bullied and went through a lot of different experiences. I became committed to help as many youths as I can, teaching them how to be successful in life and showing them how special they are. In 1996, I became a Specialized Foster Parent. I ran a Residential Foster Home for two years in 2000, having an array of different children in my care. This taught my family to encourage and love everyone where they are. I obtained my Master's Degree in Community Economic Development in 2004. I earned my Theology Degree and participated in several Parenting Curriculums. When my two cousins entered the foster care system, my family asked me to step in and keep

them together. In 2012, I became a Kinship Foster Parent working with the great workers at Park Street DCF. It was then that I learned about MAFF. I soon joined the board to bring their resources to the families from the Park St office. I adopted my two little cousins in 2018. In addition to my older two sons, they are the joy of my life! I am currently working to become a Child Specific Parent. As Foster, Kinship, Adoptive and Guardianship parents, we have the power to set positive examples in the lives of today's youth. With positive reinforcement and continued support, they can be successful and know that it is okay to love two sets of parents. I encourage people to become foster parents and make a difference in the lives of youth.

We want you!

Maybe you have thought about becoming a MAFF representative before or perhaps this is the first time you are considering it. Either way, we want to talk to you! We have area office MAFF board representative vacancies to fill and we are looking for foster and adoptive parents from across the state to join us in addressing the barriers foster, kinship and adoptive families face. MAFF meets quarterly and there are opportunities to join subcommittees depending on your area of interest.



We believe MAFF is most effective with representation from every area of the Commonwealth. Please consider filling a vacancy and reach out to us with questions today! maff@eliotchs.org

A Letter from the MAFF President



Dear Parents,

It's been a different kind of summer this year, and now we are looking at an awful lot of uncertainty for the school year. One thing remains consistent: the love and support you have shown our kids through all this. Social media was blowing up with ideas of how to get adventurous with summer excursions while social distancing. Then came all of the suggestions on how to set up for remote learning, with the aim of getting our kids out of their pj's for school. There were numerous discussions weighing the options of returning to school. It is nice to see how during the quarantine you all developed your own little villages of support.

This September marks an end to the first year with our new executive board. Let me start by saying thank you to Kelly and Missy for all your help and support the past year. It has been wonderful working together. We have been busy, that is for sure. We took on a new look for the organization by updating the bylaws and creating some new committees. We spent a lot of time in the State House introducing ourselves to Representatives and Senators to talk about MAFF's priorities. Since the COVID curveball, our priorities may have adjusted a little, but one that remains important is the Foster Parent Bill of Rights. I am so pleased to say that the FPBOR has passed in both the House and the Senate. While we aren't across the finish line yet, we are hopeful it will be soon.

We spent some time making the rounds introducing ourselves and were invited to begin attending different supervisor and managers meetings. We now have a great working relationship with Commissioner Spears which allowed us to co-host a webinar, with more to follow. With DCF, we established the Foster Home Safety and Support Workgroup to discuss the 51A process and ways of improving it. It has been a productive year, and we have a lot of work ahead of us. Of all the things we have done this year, I have to say my favorite part was having the opportunity to meet the amazing families that have reached out to us. We could not do the work we are doing without all your input. The goal of this organization is to work in support of foster kinship adoptive and guardianship families, so without you we are nothing. I appreciate the time you took to come to us with suggestions or problems that needed to be addressed. While I am sure we were not able to help everyone, please know that we did our best and will continue to do our best in our second year. We welcome your input so please reach out when you can.

We know this school year will not be an easy one but let us keep the line of communication open so we can help and support each other. I look forward to the school year and all that it can bring and teach us. Thank you for all you do for the children. It does not go unnoticed.

Cathie Twiraga

Cathie Twiraga
MAFF President

ADOPTION JOURNEYS

Adoption Journeys is a post-adoption service of Child and Family Services provided through regional agencies throughout Massachusetts. It is a network of services and supports for adoptive families, after an adoption has been finalized, or guardianship has been granted. This is a grant-funded service, so most services are offered at no cost to families. Services are provided by adoption-competent staff, and include in-home support, advocacy, support groups, social activities and respite, and training. Adoption Journeys is a family centered and consumer driven model of supports, intended to help support and address a family's unique needs.

Families need not wait until a major problem has occurred before asking for assistance. If you are a family, getting ready to finalize an adoption, it is worth reaching out and connecting with your local office. Visit <https://child-familyservices.org/adoption-journeys-program-components/> to learn more.

~~~

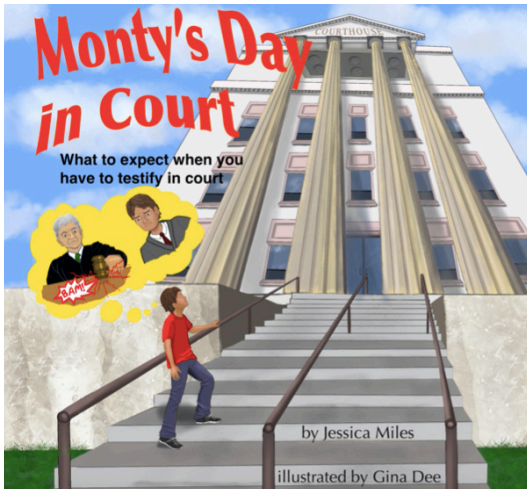
Check out an event they sponsored on July 21st where families were invited to use the kayaks for the afternoon!





# BOOKS WE'RE READING

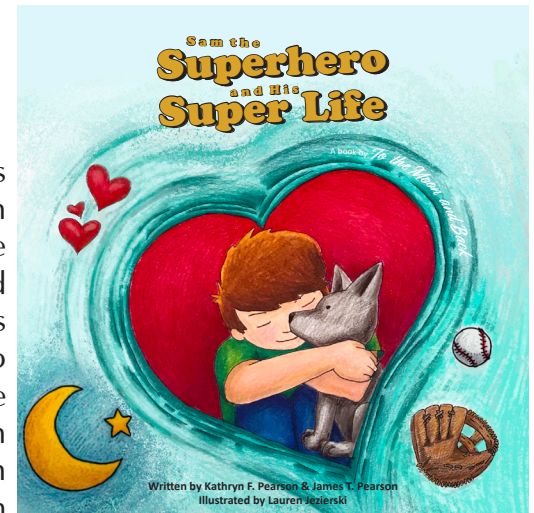
## **"Monty's Day in Court"** Written by Jessical Miles Illustrated by Gina Dee



"Monty's Day in Court" is the First Children's Book Written from the Perspective of a Child Who Testifies in Court Against his Abuser. This new book shows young people they have the power to bring about change for themselves and others. Monty's story serves as a tool for children in learning resilience and as an aid for those on the front lines helping young people through challenging times. "Monty's Day in Court" assists therapists, court programs, social workers, teachers, law enforcement, attorneys and parents in helping children better understand the process of testifying in court and reduce the traumatic impact of the experience. It can be purchased on Amazon and all proceeds from the sale will benefit Bikers Against Child Abuse. Read more about it here: [www.montysdayincourt.com](http://www.montysdayincourt.com)

## **"Sam the Superhero and His Superlife"** Written by Kathryn & James Pearson Illustrated by Lauren Jezierski

Sam the Superhero and His Superlife is the brand new children's book from To The Moon and Back--A nonprofit organization dedicated to children born with in utero substance exposure and their families. The title was conceptualized by 8-year-old Sophia Markella and the story was brought to life by authors Kathryn & James Pearson. The book aims to provide insight into the long term symptoms of Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) and negate the stigma attached to children born with this condition. The story centers around Sam, a child born substance-exposed, and his sidekick stuffed dog, Hercules. Sam lives with his grandparents and has good and bad days like any child, made more challenging due to his birth history. But similar to a superhero, Sam has his own super courage and great strength, and with his loving grandparents, friends and Hercules, Sam finds the support he needs to succeed.



## **MSPCC KID'S NET BIENNIAL CONFERENCE: SUPPORTING GENDER AND RACIAL DIVERSITY IN FOSTER FAMILIES OCTOBER 16TH, 2020**

Our upcoming conference is going virtual! Even though we cannot be together in person this year, we are excited for you to join us on October 16th from the comfort of your own homes as we hear from exciting keynote speakers who will share their thoughts and experiences on Supporting Gender and Racial Diversity in Foster Families.

We will be sending a separate mailing with the details soon, so keep an eye on your mailboxes and visit our website mid-September for more information: [www.mspcc.org/kidsnet](http://www.mspcc.org/kidsnet)



## A LETTER FROM COMMISSIONER SPEARS

Every year, summer feels like it's over before it begins. Hopefully, you found time to relax or take a vacation in a place you love, especially given the difficult spring we had. My deepest thanks for your understanding and for continuing to work with us on your travel plans as the Commonwealth's Travel Order remains in effect.

As our attention pivots to the new school year, I want to share some of our work over the summer. Our education team has been working very closely with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to assure our foster children's unique education needs are met. DESE's COVID-19 website has information about your foster child's school district and FAQs ([www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/)). We will be sending you more detailed information as the start of classes gets closer, but if you're still unsure whether a child is attending school remotely, in-person, or a combination of both, please reach out to your Family Resource Worker.

We've also anticipated the demand for daycare increasing in the fall. Childcare slots continue to be available to foster parents but will be limited by the public health emergency. Babysitting remains an option and you can contact your regional Kid's Net director regarding availability ([www.mspcc.org/kidsnet](http://www.mspcc.org/kidsnet)).

In July, we continued our transition to in-person Family Time visits in combination with virtual visits. With your help, we've been successful in planning parent/child visits in the community and outdoors at the Area Offices. I can't emphasize enough how critical you've been to this effort—providing transportation when needed and supervising visits at your homes when it's safe to do so. As we weather this pandemic, the agency must constantly think outside of the box and our outdoor visits are an example. We're learning that both children and parents get so much more out of their time together in spaces where they can interact more naturally as a family and this will become part of our permanent practice.

We've also learned there's more room for technology in our day-to-day activities than we thought. Over the summer, we held five virtual foster parent town halls and transitioned MAPP online. In addition to being able to continue MAPP groups that began before the pandemic, we've also started new MAPP groups online.

Although both the science and medical communities understand more about COVID-19 compared to February and March, there is still uncertainty. Thank you for partnering with our Family Resource staff to work through COVID-related health concerns and for bearing with us as we adapt to the ever-changing circumstances of the virus. DCF continues to monitor and follow national Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines and consult with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health so we can employ the best health and safety protocols possible.

Every day I think about how extremely lucky the Commonwealth is to have foster parents like you. The stress and demands of these last five months are like nothing we've ever experienced before, impacting our lives both personally and professionally. Through it all, you've stayed strong for our children, extending yourselves in the most generous and compassionate ways that make me so proud that you are DCF foster parents!



The Kid's Net staff are ready to support foster families this Fall! We know many aspects of life are uncertain these days and Kid's Net is here to help! Please reach out to our regional staff and FRL's with your questions and concerns. As usual, Kid's Net is ready to help with overnight respite and short-term childcare. We are excited to offer our Fall training schedule virtually from September through December. Additionally,

our FRL's will be leading smaller, virtual support groups regularly by area office. Please look out for our schedule that will be sent by mail in September and will also be available on our website and on FosterMA Connect! Visit [www.mspcc.org/kidsnet](http://www.mspcc.org/kidsnet) for more information, and email [kidsnet@mspcc.org](mailto:kidsnet@mspcc.org) for any questions.



## Massachusetts Alliance for Families

### MAFF OFFICERS

President: Cathie Twiraga

Vice President: Kelly Lamb

Secretary: Missy Tarjick

### MAFF AREA REPRESENTATIVES

Brockton: Rebecca Hally

Cape Ann: Laura Pacheco

Cape/Island: Melissa Anderson

Coastal: Carol Fitzgibbon

Greenfield: Dondi and Shirley Mitchell

Fall River: Cynthia Ruest

Framingham: Mary Robbins

Holyoke: Tracy Collins

Hyde Park: Vanesa Morales

Lawrence: Joean Serrano

Lowell: Steve Mesite

Lynn: Elise Caputi

Metro North: Laura Gaughan

New Bedford: Michael Kramer

Park Street: Juanita Grant

Pittsfield: Jennifer Leggett Strange

Plymouth: Laura & Paul Taberner

Springfield: Marianna L. Litovich

Worcester-East: Jill Cummings

## WE ARE YOUR STATE FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION.



### ABOUT US

The Massachusetts Alliance for Families (MAFF) is a state-wide association of DCF foster, adoptive, and kinship caregivers. The MAFF Board is charged with ensuring that MAFF's work is informed by a statewide perspective and addresses existing regional disparities. MAFF events are open to all DCF foster, adoptive, and kinship caregivers and other supporters are welcome and encouraged to participate in advancing MAFF's advocacy agenda.

### OUR PRIORITIES:

MAFF's advocacy is focused on ensuring that children in DCF care and their caregivers have access to services and resources to support healthy physical and emotional development and enable them to succeed academically and socially. This includes recruitment and retention of well-trained and supported foster families and resources to enhance placement stability and help youth prepare to lead successful adult lives. For more detail about our current advocacy efforts go to [www.mspcc.org/maff](http://www.mspcc.org/maff).



Follow us  
@InstantFamilies



Like us  
@InstantFamilies

Visit us  
[mspcc.org/maff](http://mspcc.org/maff)