

Mandeville foster mom receives quality parenting award

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APR 4, 2022 - 6:00 AM

There's a shift in thinking about the role of foster parents who are typically asked to provide emergency or short-term care to children removed from their homes, all thanks to an initiative that seeks to help foster parents create the kind of lasting relationships that each child needs in his or her life.

Louisiana is one of 10 states to join the Quality Parenting Initiative that began in 2008 in Florida. As part of that program, foster parents receive training to model the excellent parenting skills that can help birth parents who are able to regain their child.

Krista Bruno, of Mandeville, recently received the Elevate and Celebrate Award from QPI for her work fostering a strong relationship with birth parents. She was nominated by a case manager with the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services. Bruno is one of four southeast Louisianans to be honored by the QPI national network; the others are Teri Hrabovsky, of Marrero, along with Kara and Erik Medlock, of Livingston Parish.

Bruno and her husband were pursuing an open adoption when they decided to take the training to foster.

"I don't think we're doing anything out of the ordinary," she said of the award. Bruno believes the communication they have with their foster children's birth family is essential.

"We think they should have the assurance we're taking the best care of their baby while they're out of their care. We hope these families feel that."

The Brunos were fostering a little boy when the caseworker called about a little girl that had just been born and was leaving the hospital that day.

"We've had her ever since," she said, although reunification with the family of birth is still the goal. "We 100% raise them like they're our own children. Even our family treats them" as their own.

"Who knows where this will lead," Bruno said, adding that she and husband Zack are open to adopting both children. "God put us where we need to be now" in the lives of these two children.

"That's the one thing fostering you have to know going into it, and be OK with it," she said of the reality that the children could be returned to a biological parent. "We knew we weren't just going to be bringing a child into our house, but a child and their family."

During the training to be a certified foster family, she and her husband learned the concept, "but a lot of it you figure out as you go along." Bruno said her work schedule is flexible and she and the caseworkers coordinate with the biological parents to facilitate meetings for the children.

They had heard about children who were adopted or fostered that never knew their biological family. Although in some cases, for the security and well-being of the child, there cannot be contact with the biological parent — reunification is still the goal of the child welfare system.

"I can't imagine them not knowing their family. We want them to always know where they came from," she said. "You can never have too much family."

She hopes others will investigate becoming foster parents because there is such a great need.

"Not just babies, all ages need a good family home," Bruno said. "If you can help out even one child, consider it because you are needed."

Bruno and the other three foster parents were honored in a virtual awards ceremony held by the Youth Law Center, which began QPI to help kin, foster, birth and other resource families become excellent parents.

For information on QPI, visit www.qpi4kids.org or email Terry Harrak at tharrak@qpiylc.org