



Government of Bermuda
Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors

Ministerial Statement

By

The Hon. Tinée Furbert, JP, MP
Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors

Foster Care Month – May 2024

Friday, May 31st, 2024

Mr. Speaker,

MAY is celebrated as FOSTER CARE MONTH!

This morning I rise to provide this Honourable House with an update on the continued work being undertaken by the Department of Child & Family Services within their remit to safeguard Bermuda's children.

Mr. Speaker,

Every year the Department of Child & Family Services designates the month of May to recruit new foster parents and to honour Bermuda's current foster parents. The Foster Care Team had a full month of recruitment activities planned. This included appearing as guests on the "Motion to Adjourn" radio show on May 2nd and "The Daily Hour" morning show on May 8th. The Foster Care Coordinator, Ms. Selena Simons was an invited guest to an in-person presentation at the Hamilton Seventh Day Adventist Church on King Street on May 11th. There were additional radio talks planned with local radio stations throughout the month. The Department of Communications also prepared colorful graphics that were used

throughout the month for recruiting foster care parents via the government social media pages.

Whilst we are pleased and thankful for the current pool of foster parents who are to be commended for the role that they play in providing stability to our foster children, we must express our plea vehemently – We Need More Foster Parents. Foster Parents open their hearts and their homes by taking in children who need nurturing, guidance and love. These children cannot remain with their families of origin for a variety of reasons. Foster Parents fill in the gap with the ongoing support of the Department of Child & Family Services.

Mr. Speaker,

I take great pleasure in informing this Honorable House that on Sunday, May 5th 2024, I attended the Annual Appreciation Tea for our Foster Parents. At this event the Department of Child & Family Services was able to show tangible gratitude to foster parents, kinship caregivers and respite care providers. Musical selections were provided by the talented Neriah Bean who is the current head boy at the Bermuda Institute. Mr. Paul Smith provided beautiful sounds on the steel pan while guests were dining.

Mr. Speaker,

It is always good to see the fruit of one's labor. The guest speaker for the Foster Care Appreciation Tea was Miss Lashuntae Dill-Assing. This young lady had a very interesting story to share about her years as a foster care child and in the Sunshine League children's home. Miss Dill-Assing is a shining star! She is a graduate of Cedarbridge Academy who persevered through various childhood obstacles to later study at Delaware State University where she obtained a Bachelor's degree in Nursing. Miss Dill-Assing was the first recipient of the Foster Parent Association's Scholarship titled: The Glenda Edwards Further Education Award.

Mr. Speaker,

A highlight of the Foster Care Appreciation Tea is the honoring of foster families with special awards. This year three families were honored:

1. Ms. Myra Walker was highlighted for her ongoing dedication to her foster child from infancy to the age of 18 becoming a young lady. Ms Walker's foster child is now preparing to graduate from The Berkeley Institute and she has been the constant mother figure to her her foster child for her entire life.
2. Mr. & Mrs. Anthony and Susan Richardson were awarded the foster youth champions award for the active role that they played in fostering and providing respite to boys in foster care. And,
3. Ms. Irene Francis was presented with a beautiful arrangement of flowers upon her retiring from her tenure as a foster parent after serving for twenty years.

It should also be noted that the event was enhanced with the provision of a number of door prizes for foster parents; these were donated generously by former foster youth Mrs. Lavonne Lee-Smith, a businesswoman and entrepreneur who was the guest speaker for the same event several years ago.

Mr. Speaker,

The recognition and highlighting of Foster Care Month is not complete without expressing a huge thank you to the Foster Parents Association Charity #620. This Association works diligently with the community to raise funds and obtain needed items for foster children. The Foster Parents Association is comprised of active foster parents and they too should be commended for the ongoing tangible support given to Bermuda's foster children. This year the Association recognized: Senator Lindsay Simmons-Wilson who was awarded the 2024 Foster Parent of the Year Award. Ms. Selena Simons, our Foster Care Coordinator was presented with the Social Worker of the Year Award; and Ms Simone Romaine, a Foster Care Social Worker was presented with the runner-up award.

Mr. Speaker,

I close by stating that our children, vulnerable for many reasons, need us. The Ministry of Youth, Social Development & Seniors takes this time on behalf of all of the children in foster care, to thank those individuals who have opened their homes and have given of themselves to make a difference in the life of children. We encourage more people within our community to become foster parents. In so doing, **Mr. Speaker**, such persons will help the Department of Child & Family

Services in its quest to provide caring, safe, nurturing homes for children when their families are unable to care for them.

Mr. Speaker,

I thank all members of this Honorable House along with persons within the community who acknowledged and saluted Bermuda's Foster Parents during the month of May and, our Social Workers as they continue to #Inspire Action and Lead Change. We must highlight the significance of Social Workers and their collective contributions to helping and advocating on behalf of all of those whom they serve. Please join me in wishing all Foster Parents and Social Workers a Happy Foster Care Month!

Thank You, **Mr. Speaker**