

# 2026 Foster Families of the Year

## Eastern Mountain



**Kaleb Murry and Kelsey Gray-Murry**

Caleb and Kelsey Murry have been foster parents for the Eastern Mt. Region since 2022. Their very first placement was a medically complex infant. This family instantly said yes without any hesitation. Despite the difficulties they faced, this family never showed any fear, doubt, or resistance. Since then, they have adopted this child. The Murry's went on and accepted another medically complex infant, which again, said yes without hesitation.

Their home is not just a place of care but also a place of healing, resilience, and unwavering commitment, especially in the face of medical complexity.

This family has opened their hearts and home to children with significant medical needs, stepping into a role that requires not only compassion, but advanced advocacy, coordination, and constant vigilance. Mr. and Mrs. Murry manage medications, appointments, therapies, and unexpected emergencies with grace and determination, all while ensuring each child feels safe, loved, and valued.

What sets this family apart is their ability to see beyond diagnoses. They do not define children by their medical conditions. They celebrate their personalities, milestones, and potential. Whether it's attending countless specialist visits, learning new medical procedures, or advocating fiercely within systems, they approach every challenge with strength and purpose.

Despite the demands, their home is filled with warmth, stability, and joy. They create normalcy in situations that are anything but normal by celebrating birthdays, encouraging growth, and building lasting connections. Their patience and dedication provide children not only with care, but with dignity and hope.

This family embodies what foster parenting is truly about: showing up fully, loving unconditionally, and going above and beyond—especially when it's hardest. Their commitment to medically complex children is nothing short of remarkable, and their impact is life-changing.

## Northeastern



### Timothy and Jean Slaughter

Timothy and Jean Slaughter, esteemed foster parents in Northeastern DCBS, embarked on their journey to foster care with determination, becoming an approved foster and adoptive home in May 2006. Over nearly 19 years, they have opened their hearts and home to approximately 125 children in foster care, making an indelible mark on their lives. Timothy and Jean Slaughter are exemplary advocates for the most vulnerable children, fully embodying the values and mission of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS).

Timothy and Jean Slaughter have built an impressive reputation as a highly sought-after foster home in the Northeastern region. Without hesitation, they step up to provide a haven for foster children during critical times, ensuring that these kids not only have a safe place to stay but also remain close to their families, preserving those vital connections.

Timothy and Jean Slaughter exemplify a profound commitment to meeting the heterogeneous needs of each child placed in their care, creating a nurturing environment where every child feels safe, valued, and empowered. Their effectiveness as foster parents shines through in the children's remarkable ability to adapt and thrive in their educational and therapeutic journeys. As passionate advocates for at-risk children, they wholeheartedly support the mission of reunification, providing essential resources that facilitate smooth transitions for both children and parents. Their unwavering dedication leaves a profound impact on the lives they touch, showcasing the power of love and commitment in foster care.

## The Lakes



### Angela and Rickie Keese

Angela and Rickie Keese were approved as basic foster parents on March 17, 2025. The Keese family has 3 biological daughters of their own. Since being approved, the Keese family has provided foster care for 18 children. They are currently providing foster care for 4 children, 3 of which are a sibling set. The Keese family accepted placement of a HAY child shortly after being approved. The placement was disrupted approximately a month and a half later due to behaviors. Mr. and Ms. Keese report that they have maintained daily phone contact with the child and they are working with the child's social service workers to bring her back to their home. Ms. Keese reported that "we were new. We didn't have experience or enough training. We feel we are more prepared now as we have a better understanding of behaviors and triggers. We are her family, and she is ours. I can't imagine our lives without her in it." The Keese family is also currently in the process of adopting a teen who was placed in their home.

Angela has shared her personal phone number with other military families to provide assistance with navigating school enrollments and other issues. Angela has also volunteered time to sit on the guest panel for session 6 of the NTDC training to offer encouragement to upcoming foster parents to foster sibling sets and teens.

## Cumberland



### **Nathaniel and Betty Yoder**

Nathaniel and Betty Yoder were selected as the Cumberland Service Region Foster Family of the Year for 2026 because they consistently demonstrate what it means to provide safe, stable, and compassionate care to children and families in need. Their home is more than a placement; it is a place where children feel valued, understood, and supported during some of the most difficult moments of their lives.

Nathaniel and Betty approach fostering with patience, empathy, and a deep commitment to each child's well-being. Whether caring for children with complex behavioral needs, sibling groups, or youth experiencing their first out-of-home placement, they remain calm, flexible, and solution-focused. They take the time to learn

each child's history, strengths, and triggers, and they tailor their parenting approach to meet those individual needs.

Beyond meeting basic care requirements, Nathaniel and Betty go above and beyond to create a sense of normalcy and belonging. They ensure children stay connected to their culture, school, and community whenever possible. They advocate strongly within team meetings, medical and educational settings, and court processes, always keeping the child's best interest at the center of every decision. Their communication with case managers and service providers is consistent, respectful, and proactive, making them a reliable and trusted partner in the child welfare system.

*One of their greatest strengths is their ability to support reunification while maintaining a positive and respectful relationship with biological families. They encourage healthy connections, assist with visitation transitions, and model appropriate co-parenting when appropriate. Their understanding that fostering is about supporting the entire family system sets them apart.*

Additionally, Nathaniel and Betty are leaders within the foster care community. They willingly participate in foster parent retention events, share resources, and offer guidance based on their experiences. Their willingness to step in during emergencies and accept placements on short notice has provided critical support to the region during times of high need.

Nathaniel and Betty Yoder exemplify dedication, resilience, and heart. Their impact extends far beyond their home, positively influencing children, families, and professionals across the Cumberland Service Region. For these reasons, they are truly deserving of being recognized as Foster Family of the Year for 2026.

## Northern Bluegrass



### **Tricia Partin and Jessica Hazelbaker**

Tricia Partin and Jerica Hazelbaker became certified foster parents in March of 2023. They currently have placement of seven foster children including two sets of siblings. They finalized their first adoption in October of 2025 with the second one in the next few months. They truly exemplify what it means to lead with love, advocacy, and unwavering commitment to children and families. Their journey as foster/adoptive parents is defined not only by the care they've given to the children in their home but also by the impact they've made across their community through collaboration, creativity, and heart.

From the beginning, Tricia and Jerica have gone above and beyond to advocate for the best interests of every child placed in their care regardless of how long the child is in their home. They take initiative to ensure each child's emotional and developmental needs are met, often working hand in hand with social workers, therapists, and daycare to create individualized plans for success. Their ability to communicate openly and respectfully with professionals has made them trusted partners in the child welfare system, people others turn to for insight, support, and encouragement.

Tricia and Jerica also make a lasting difference beyond their own home. They have become strong advocates for foster care and adoption awareness, sharing their experiences to encourage other families to open their hearts to foster and adopting. Their willingness to mentor new foster families, answer questions, and offer emotional support demonstrates their deep commitment to strengthening the larger community of care.

Perhaps most remarkable is how seamlessly they work together as a team. Tricia and Jerica model partnership, supporting one another through challenges, balancing responsibilities, and celebrating successes together. Their unity provides stability for the children they love and serves as a beautiful example of what it means to parent with shared purpose. Their daughter Charley has also shown such amazing compassion and awareness by being the best big sister!

Through advocacy, initiative, creativity, and collaboration, Tricia and Jerica have touched countless lives. Their home radiates acceptance, structure, laughter, and understanding. They represent the very best of what adoptive families can be, resourceful, compassionate, and deeply devoted to creating lasting change.

It is with great admiration and gratitude that I nominate Tricia and Jerica for the 2026 Foster Family of the Year Award. Their dedication not only transforms the lives of the children they welcome into their home but also strengthens the entire child welfare community.

## Salt River Trail



### **Kristi and Joey Chesser**

Kristi and Joey Chesser have been resource foster parents in Bullitt County since February 6th, 2024. In the short time that they have been an open home, the Chesser family have been an outstanding resource for the Salt River Trail region and have assisted in providing high quality care for our teenagers, sibling groups, and high acuity youth.

The Chesser family quickly became a Care Plus foster home after opening to ensure the best care for all placements they receive and are now an Advanced Care

Plus home. They have received a total of 11 placements since opening, 8 of which have been designated as Care Plus. They have taken placements as short term only to keep them from a Non-Traditional setting and continued to foster them passed the short-term time frame if no safety risks were presented. They have maintained placement of sibling groups and children ranging in age from 1-15 years old. The home currently has 4 children placed in their home, including a sibling group of 3. They have maintained placement of the sibling group since February of 2024 and recently received their newest placement in November of 2025.

All 4 of their current placements are designated as Care Plus. The home is highly supportive of all placements that have entered their home. They have shown flexibility by allowing children they agreed to as short-term placement to stay with them and have worked well with the Cabinet on placement timeframes. They have advocated for each of their placements receiving the best possible care, including notifying the Cabinet of Care Plus needs, advocating for teenage youth to be included in conversations and notified of their options, and participating in team meetings, case planning, and court hearings regarding next steps for children in their care. They have shown initiative and self-sufficiency by going out of their way to find the best service providers, and the ability to handle abnormal behaviors from children without outside intervention. They have shown an ability to parent out of home care youth and think outside the box on how to discipline children with different needs, trauma responses, and personality traits. They work in partnership with CHFS, community partners, and biological families for the best care of our children. It is highly recommended by this SSC that the Chesser family be nominated as foster parents of the year for their actions, advocacy, and outstanding support for our foster youth in the years of 2025-2026.

## Southern Bluegrass



### Sharon Secord

Sharon Secord became an approved DCBS foster home in March 2023. During our first home visit, she restated what she had said in her home study: That she was only interested in fostering teens. Ms. Secord had settled in Kentucky after moving from Detroit MI, where she had raised two children of her own who are now adults. She decided to become a foster parent, taking placements aged 14-18. She quickly became an extremely valued asset to DCBS Foster Care. Sharon's acceptance scale is very accommodating, having a substantial list of diagnoses and behaviors that she was willing to work with.

Her first placement was a male teen who had struggled to maintain placement in foster care. That first placement was adopted by Sharon at age 17, just months after being placed. Since then, she has consistently accepted additional teens, including her adopted son's biological brother who he had been separated from. The foster parent is very proactive with assisting her placements in becoming active and adjusted individuals. She ensures they attend school and helps them find employment that does not interfere with their education. She focuses on the children's futures and gives them the support and direction for them to become successful adults.

She works with the teens to get their driver's licenses and helps them to develop independent living skills. Ms. Secord's foster placements experience travel (often for the first time), going on vacations and to visit her family residing in Texas and Michigan. The extended family is very supportive of her fostering and are welcoming of her placements. Sharon Secord has shown an ability to provide stable, successful placements for hard-to-place children, keeping them out of non-traditional and residential settings.

This can't be appreciated enough and I feel she should be considered for the region's Foster Parent/Family of the Year Award.

## Two Rivers



Dave and Bernice Trobaugh

Dave and Bernice Trobaugh have dedicated an extraordinary 50 years of their lives to serving others as foster parents, demonstrating a level of compassion, commitment, and selflessness. They reside in Monroe County, in Two Rivers Service Region. Over the course of five decades, the Trobaugh's have opened their home to countless children in need. They have cared for sibling groups, welcomed teenagers who are often the hardest to place, and stepped in during urgent situations—ensuring that no child was left without a safe place to sleep, even if only for a single night. Their willingness to say “yes” when others could not has made an immeasurable difference in the lives of vulnerable children.

In addition to fostering, Dave and Bernice have also adopted children from foster care, providing not just temporary refuge, but permanent love and stability. Their home has been more than a placement—it has been a foundation for healing, growth, and hope.

Their impact extends far beyond the time children spend in their care. Many of the young people they have fostered, now adults, continue to maintain strong, positive relationships with them. Some of those relationships stem back 40 years ago. These individuals still turn to the Trobaugh's for guidance, advice, and support—a testament to the lasting trust and love they have built.

Dave and Bernice Trobaugh have been invaluable assets to their community and the Two Rivers region. Their lifelong service has strengthened families, uplifted children, and inspired those around them. Their legacy is not measured simply in years, but in the countless lives they have changed for the better.

For their unwavering dedication, compassion, and profound impact, Dave and Bernice Trobaugh are highly deserving of recognition for being outstanding foster parents.

## Jefferson



**Marnita Skinner**

*Marnita Skinner began her foster care journey as a relative/fictive kin DCBS foster parent. Marnita transitioned into a basic DCBS foster home and hit the ground running. Marnita Skinner goes above and beyond to always ensure our youth and families are supported. Marnita does not shy away from accepting youth with complex needs. Marnita Skinner works well with our high-acuity youth, by supporting them at their most vulnerable time. Marnita is a great advocate that is always willing to answer the phone at any hour. Jefferson Service Region really appreciates the open arms and kindness that Ms. Skinner brings to the foster care community.*