



This fall has been full of exciting news, lots of support for our #sjkids, and changes taking place all over St. Joe's campus.

Also, November is National Adoption Month, so we're pulling out all the stops to bring awareness through media, myth busters, and adoption stories — such as the Cornett Family's in this newsletter. Check out some of our recent highlights, get the scoop on what's going on with construction updates, and see how you can further support St. Joe's children!

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**Mission Moment**  
Bringing Awareness During National Adoption Month



# National Adoption Month

November 2021

Each year, November is recognized as National Adoption Month. This month is particularly important to us at St. Joe's. We do everything we can to spread the word about what adoption truly is and raise awareness to advocate for the children who are looking for their forever families.

This month is an initiative of the [U.S. Children's Bureau](#), and each year they choose "*a new adoption-related theme to help support professionals working each day to find permanency for children and youth in foster care in their community*". This year's theme is "Conversations Matter" — highlighting the importance of encouraging children in foster care or waiting for adoption to talk about their goals and feelings.

A recurring theme for National Adoption Month is emphasizing the need for adoption of teens and older children. The following are important statistics from the [2019 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System](#) that highlight the hardships faced by older children waiting to be adopted:

- There are over 122,000 children and youth waiting to be adopted who are at risk of aging out of foster care without permanent family connections.
- Approximately one in five children in the U.S. foster care system waiting to be adopted are teens.
- Teens, ages 15-18, wait significantly longer for permanency when compared to their peers.
- Only 5 percent of all children adopted in 2019 were 15-18 years old.

Just a heads up, don't forget to tune in to **WAVE 3 News today at 2 pm** for an interview with St. Joe's CEO Grace Akers and St. Joe's parents Mannie Stone and Sam Mandina. These three are going to explain what this month means to them, while Mannie and Sam share their very own journey with adoption. Also, be sure to follow along on social media as we debunk adoption myths each

Monday and share excerpts from stories of other St. Joe's families.

## Cornett Party of Four

Read on to hear the Cornett family's story, written by Gina Cornett, about becoming a family of four!



2014

2020



*"We have created lifelong friendships with the people involved in this whole process...St. Joe's has one goal in mind, to keep families together, or create ones that will last. We are forever changed."*

We knew we wanted a family, and that our path to get there was going to be different.

We were referred to St. Joe's by a family friend. We took our nine weeks of classes and every single class definitely pulled at our heart strings. We knew that we wanted to be here. We knew our hearts were in it. So many stories, so many scenarios were given and told. The specialists at St. Joe's were very transparent about our journey and what could occur.

Our initial want was for a baby. We knew what we wanted, and what our goals were. We had a plan. We completed our training and had been called for a placement. I was sick with strep, and selfishly I felt unready. You have to take care of kids, even when you are sick, but we still declined the placement. I felt guilty for saying no, but we didn't feel ready. Around Thanksgiving 2012 we had met up with some friends for dinner. They were fostering two siblings, 5 and 6 years old, and we actually left that visit reevaluating our original wants, our original plan. Now, these specific kiddos had a goal — to return to their birth family. But, maybe older kiddos were in our future after all. Our hearts were changed after one visit.

Late December we were asked to keep a couple of kiddos for a weekend respite. We were able to, and it was the 5 and 6 year old we had met one month prior. That was the most fun and tiring weekend. To say we were smitten was an understatement. Our hearts were pulled to them. Within the next week or so, a

dynamic change had occurred, and those two siblings were in need of a placement. We got the call again to see if we could bring them into our home. Since they had met us prior and knew us, it would be less stressful on them. These two had a plan. They were going back to mom. We were just going to be the in-between until they could get there. We prayed about it. This wasn't what we wanted. Remember me saying we had a plan? Sometimes the return to families can be a very long process. We decided that we could be their stable and constant until they could be placed back with their mom. They were brought to us on a Friday and Monday we were signing placement papers and they were in a different school by Wednesday. That is sometimes how it goes. Whirlwind.

We continued to guide and create structure for these littles, all the while taking them to see the birth mom on the weekends, going to meetings and court hearings, multiple monthly home visits, reports, and incident reports. All the things related to getting these kiddos back to their family. By the end of January, the birth mom had been granted over night visits. She would pick them up from school on Fridays and we would get them from school on Mondays. We'd spend the weekdays with them while she had the weekends. It was all going as planned. There was an end goal for them, but of course there were wrinkles. This wholeheartedly is not a perfect process. There are so many gray areas and it can truly feel like a cloudy day on the days full of sunshine. The weekend visits continued for the next month or so. Then it was Spring break. There was going to be a long visit with the birth mom. Only this time we were informed that this would be the transition for them to stay with her.

This was their going back. This was their plan, their goal. It was heart wrenching. We love them. We took them to school that Friday, they didn't ride the bus. Extra hugs bye. She picked them up from school that Friday as planned, and shockingly by 7 pm we had received a call that was not the norm, in this situation. The mom called the CPS worker and told her that she could not take care of them, asking if we could come and get them. She wanted us to take them. She knew that they would be better off with us. Her words. We were beside ourselves. I cried the entire hour drive to go pick them up. So many emotions and questions, levels of life changes for everyone involved. It was sad. We wanted them, but there was a mom that had to give them up for us to have them. The end goal was just to go get them and bring them home. Bring them to our home, now their home. The rest would be figured out later. She handed them over to us, and she said to our kids, "They will take care of you". These are the parts you are not prepared for, because nothing is seamless. Our kids had questions. We had questions. We continued on, and looked toward us becoming a forever family. We humbly kept this whole process very transparent with our kids. They knew when we went to court and they knew what everything was about. It helped them work through the difficulty of the way life had been changing.

The next year and a half was a lot of court hearings, home visits, bumps in the road, and attempts at changing their goal to be with us. We introduced them to all their new family. There are a lot of us. Even though this decision was made, we still had to get permissions from the birth family to leave the state for vacations or family visits until adoption was finalized. There are so many layers. By fall 2013 Mom voluntarily terminated her rights. We spoke to her at the hearing. She made this choice for them. She told us that she knew we would take good care of them. She said those word to us, face to face. We felt like we had built a relationship of sorts through this process where she could see that these kids were going to be

in a better place than she could provide. She chose to give them a better life, right in front of us. It was humbling and heartbreaking. We still had hearings to complete the process. We would still go another 8 months before our goals were changed to adoption.

When you start this foster care/parent process you are naive to the depths and the levels of emotions that come with all that is tied up with these kiddos. You can write anything you want down on a piece of paper. You can set a plan in place. Things change. Your heart changes. Events happen. You just have to be there for every moment to support them and love them. Our plans had changed. Our goals were different now. Through this entire process we had the support of St. Joe's and their entire team. From the secretary who checked us in every day of therapy, or for the mom-goodbye visit, all the way to the foster care specialists and therapists that have been with us and our kids from the very beginning. They helped guide us and hugged us and talked to us, talked us through hard stuff and happy times. They loved us. We have created lifelong friendships with the people involved in this whole process. They are a part of our village. St. Joe's has one goal in mind, to keep families together, or create ones that will last. We are forever changed.

When we learned of our adoption date we talked about how when we were adopted and went to dinner and they called out our names, we would officially be Cornett Party of four. It's carried us through the ripples. Our Forever Family was established in August of 2014. Our kiddos are 14 and 15 now. We are and always will be a family. Through all the tough and happy. It's the four of us.

## Foster Care & Adoption Info Sessions Available



**LOVE**  
• is what makes a •  
**FAMILY**

If you or someone you know is interested in adopting or becoming a foster family, St. Joe's offers informational sessions the **first Tuesday of every month** at 5:45 pm.

We also offer one-on-one sessions, scheduled at your convenience, for those interested in learning more about starting the journey toward adding to or creating their forever families.

To RSVP or learn more, email [info@sjkids.org](mailto:info@sjkids.org) or call (502) 893-0241.

## Building Forever Families Campus Renovations Continue



St. Joe's [Building Forever Families Campaign](#) recently reached a huge milestone with the (almost) completion of the West Wing renovations. This includes a brand new entrance with a ramp for the Child Development Center, as well as, our Foster Care and Adoption program.

The CDC plans to move into their new space on November 15th! St. Joe's staff will be there that morning to welcome CDC parents with coffee. We can't wait to see the look on the faces of parents and children alike as they see the new entrance, new classrooms, and state-of-the-art therapy rooms.



A couple of the more sentimental features in this new space include the framing and lighting of a historical St. Joe's window salvaged before renovations and a time capsule. The time capsule will hold objects from the past or present that represent the children, families, history, and work of St. Joe's.

# Supporter Updates

## You have made this year one for the books!

While this year and the last have presented never-before-seen challenges, the wonderful supporters of St. Joe's have kept us going.

### **Picnic**

While Picnic this year looked a little different than years past, we were still able to keep the spirit of Picnic by hosting a hybrid event (unlike last year which was entirely virtual). This year, due to COVID-19 restrictions, approximately 1,000 people showed up over two days for food, fun, games, and live music!

### **Give For Good Louisville**

Our city's biggest day of non-profit giving took place on September 17th. With the help of an anonymous donor and over 130 individual donors, we were able to raise over \$61,000. We look forward to next year's event!

### **CDC Fundraiser**

Parents of our Child Development Center really stepped up this year and created a matching fundraiser to make sure our teachers and their students had the supplies they need to learn and become kindergarten ready!

### **Thank You, Arby's!**

Last but definitely not least, the Arby's Foundation has shown their support through a \$26,200 grant. Volunteers from Arby's also came out to campus to help us clean and ready the kitchen attached to the gym for a temporary move. Our food services staff will be working out of there while the landmark building is under renovation. Thank you, Arby's and Arby's Foundation!



## St. Joe's Staff Spotlight:

Damon Clyburn, Senior Residential Youth Worker



"Having been with the agency for 25 years now I would say the most rewarding aspect of my job is seeing a client find their forever home. This is St. Joe's motto and it feels great to see that fulfilled!"



Damon Clyburn,  
Senior Residential Youth Worker

Meet Damon Clyburn! His work with our residential kids is imperative to creating a safe, loving environment here at St. Joseph Children's Home. Are you or someone you know interested in joining the St. Joe's family? Visit [sjkids.org/careers/](https://sjkids.org/careers/) to view our available positions and employee benefits.

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