



*Government of Bermuda*

**Ministry of Social Development and Seniors**

**Senator Statement**

By

**Lindsay Simmons**

Junior Minister of **Social Development and Seniors**

**Foster Care Month 2021**

12<sup>th</sup> May 2021

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**Madam President,** I am pleased to advise the Senate that the month of May is celebrated as Foster Care Month. Under normal circumstances, the Department of Child & Family Services would be gearing up to hold a special recognition celebration event for Bermuda's Foster Parents. However, owing to the restrictions in place to minimize the transmission of Covid, we were unable to hold the Annual Appreciation Tea for Foster Parents in 2020 and now again in 2021. Despite this, we must take some time out to honour Bermuda's Foster Parents; they are to be commended for the role that they play in providing stability to our foster children. Foster Parents open their hearts and their homes by taking in children who for a variety of reasons cannot remain with their families. The foster parents provide nurturing, guidance and love for foster children. Foster Parents, with the support of the Department of Child & Family Services, provide a safe haven for the children.

**Madam President,** Bermuda has close to seventy (70) Foster Families on island. These persons along with their extended family members are the unsung heroes in our community. When a child enters a home as a foster child, they become intricately linked to the extended family of the foster parents. The Department of Child & Family Services, under the authority of The Children Act, 1998 is responsible for all child protection matters pertaining to young people ranging from newborn up until the age of eighteen (18). Our Foster Families are caring for these youth in need and some of them are caring for more than one foster child at a time.

**Madam President,** we have eleven (11) Foster Families who are caring for special needs foster children. These are classified as therapeutic foster children who have a combination of intense emotional, behavioral and cognitive challenges. Within this number, some of these special needs children also have physiological challenges that need the direct attention of medical specialists with overseas medical interventions being necessary to address the unique conditions. Our local pediatricians often consult with and refer to Boston Children's Hospital for this group of children. This is a growing area of concern for the Department as there is a need to recruit new foster parents who have knowledge and experience in the area of working with or caring for the special needs population. The Department run a campaign to recruit more therapeutic foster parents. To date, five (5) persons have agreed to be interviewed and they will be going through the required application process.

**Madam President,** the recognition and highlighting of Foster Care Month is not complete without expressing a huge thank you to the Foster Parents Association, Charity #620. The Foster Parents Association works diligently with the community to raise funds and obtain items for foster children. The FPA is comprised of active foster parents and they too should be commended for the ongoing support given to Bermuda's foster children.

**Madam President,** the Ministry of Social Development and 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 selflessly of themselves to make a difference in the lives of children. I encourage more people within our community to become foster parents. In so doing, Madam President,, such persons will to provide caring, safe, nurturing homes for children when their families are unable to care for them. Anyone interested in being a foster parent should contact Ms. Selena Simons on 296-7575.

**Madam President,** I encourage all members of the Senate along with all persons within the community to salute Bermuda's Foster Parents during the entire month of May as well as the staff at the Department of Child and Family Services for managing this important program. Our children, vulnerable for many reasons, need us. As a community we can pledge to enrich the lives of foster children and advocate for the needs of foster children.

**Madam President,** in closing I wish to send a message to all of our Foster children. For some, life in foster care can be extremely challenging. To sometimes feel displaced, alone, unwanted, disconnected, confused and unloved are real feelings to be recognized and acknowledged. Always know you are not alone and you are important no matter what the circumstance, if you are given a firm place to stand, stand tall and concentrate on moving the heaven and earth.

Thank you Madam President.