

Little Flower

NEWSLETTER

A Publication for Friends of Little Flower Children and Family Services of NY

Spring 2018

JOURNEY TO ADULTHOOD



One of the many things we celebrate during May is National Foster Care Month. During this month, we would like to bring attention to the lesser heard topics concerning foster youth, such as their successes and journey beyond the stigma of being in care. You may remember reading about Anthony a few years ago when he was featured for his support and passion for helping his peers, despite his own hurdles. We are honored to share with you Anthony's accomplishments, in his own words, since aging out of care and his forays into adulthood!

I entered the foster care system when I was 14 years old. I didn't have a great deal of trust, was emotionally traumatized, and just overall in a bad space. It took years for me to open up and begin to accept people into my life without having my guard up. Someone who helped me gradually open up without feeling judged was Dr. Melinda Konigsberg, VP, Medical and Mental Health, Little Flower Children and Family Services of New York.

A couple years ago at Little Flower, a group was created (and still exists to this day!) to help young people talk about issues that affected us most, in a safe, non-judgmental

space. Having my peers share similar experiences made sharing my vulnerabilities easier. Dr. Konigsberg helped to make it easier for me to vent my frustrations and things that really bothered me in that particular point of my life. Her support went further than just supportive counseling.

As I finally graduated high school and moved on to college, I started doing more things on a professional level. I was nominated by Dr. Konigsberg for the LGBTQ Allies Award. She showed support by attending the event. Likewise, when I did public speaking at NYU or graduated from my internship at Northwell Health,

"IT'S LIKE A BROKEN PUZZLE OF MISSING PIECES, NEVER HAVING A REAL HOME, MOVING AROUND SO MUCH, AND THEN YOU FINALLY FIND THE RIGHT PIECES THAT CONNECT THE DOTS."

she was there. I'm always grateful for having her to confide in and on my side as I continue to strive for more.

Along with a strong support system some other things I place high value in is my education. I've always had mixed feelings about school. When I was in care I would often talk about dropping out of high school because I often got bullied and felt like school was a waste of time. Through my support system and also thinking of my future I persevered and was able to graduate high school and enroll in LaGuardia Community College. I thought I had finally made it to the Holy Grail! But I wasn't focused at all and didn't take my classes seriously. I ended up dropping out midway through the second semester.

I felt ashamed and didn't want to talk about my school status for a long time. I felt like a failure and wanted to find an escape route, something that would make me feel productive with my time. I found some resources about Fedcaps and FEGS (Federal Employment & Guidance Service), vocational/educational programs and they helped me get a retail internship and gain experience and money. I was also heavily engaged in Youth Advisory Boards and got involved in advocacy and cross systems like juvenile justice and mental health.

After several months of exploring different things and having a better idea of what I wanted, I felt ready to jump back into school and give it my all. I got great grades at BMCC (Borough of Manhattan Community College) and then applied to, what I consider my academic turning point, Columbia University. It was such a day and night difference from BMCC and I can spend forever talking about how Columbia changed my viewpoint on many things but I'll just say it was an amazing, fulfilling journey that really pushed me to do my best. I never would've thought I would go from nearly being a high school drop-out to graduating from an Ivy League.

During these ups and downs in my life housing was always on my mind. Housing is something that most kids in foster care think about. We dread the feeling of case managers, staff members, judges, all these people having say in our life, and we have so little. Housing is the transition where you are finally a grown, independent adult, where you can finally make your own decisions.

I aged out of care when I was 21 and the last bit of services I received at Little Flower was transitional Medicaid and housing assistance. However, what I really cared

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Message from the Chief Executive Officer – Corinne Hammons



Dear Friends,

May is National Foster Care month – here at Little Flower we recognize it by sharing stories from our youth and celebrating our history and growth at our annual Msgr. John T. Fagan Awards event with our donors and friends. We also use the opportunity to thank all of the wonderful individuals who take on the role of foster parent. These mothers and fathers are such a critical element to the work that we do – thank you!

Little Flower has been focused on growth and change over the past several years and I am pleased to say that one of our primary goals in this regard was the creation of a NYC Flagship location. We will be consolidating our current Brooklyn and Queens offices into our new space in the historic Pfizer building at 630 Flushing Avenue, Brooklyn. We are excited about the possibilities this move will open up for us and look forward to being active members of the community while continuing to enrich our current relationships throughout Brooklyn and Queens. The end goal of course is to be able to better serve our clients and to improve their access to opportunities for change.

I hope you enjoy reading about some of the highlights from the past six months as much as we enjoy sharing them.

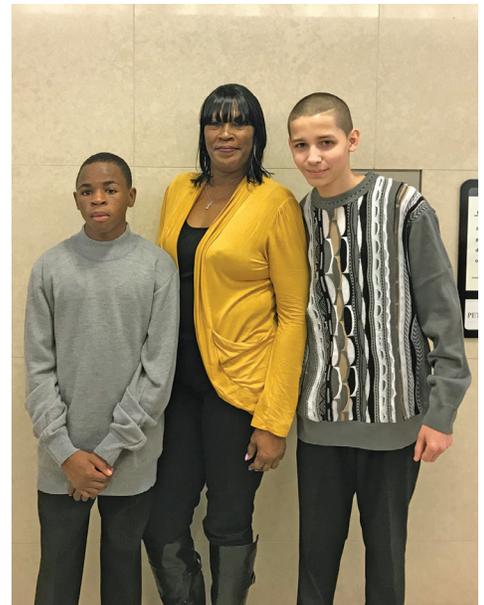
Thank you all for your support and dedication.

Sincerely,

Corinne Hammons
Chief Executive Officer

The Love of Family

Celebrated in November, National Adoption Month brings attention to the many children in foster care waiting to find their forever families. In New York City, every borough held special Adoption Days at their designated family court. We had the honor and pleasure of spending a little time with some of Little Flower's new forever families at the Brooklyn Family Court. It was an inspiring and heartfelt morning, filled with joy, hope and love – the perfect representation of the work we do and what we hope to accomplish for every child searching for their forever family!



Celebrating Our Individuals with Developmental Disabilities

Despite facing a more challenging future than most, our residents with developmental disabilities enjoy a full and active life. What they need most is encouragement, understanding, and the willingness of others to help them maximize their opportunities for becoming part of the community. That is exactly Francis K.'s experience. Francis has come a long way during his 12 years in our care, especially with the assistance of his dedicated staff member.

Francis initially became a resident on the Monsignor John T. Fagan campus in Wading River at the age of 43 in the McSharry Intermediate Care Facility (ICF), which primarily serves individuals with complex needs. He moved into the Bishop's Individual Residential Alternative (IRA) when it opened six years later. Bishop's is a small-group residence that provides residents with more opportunities for greater independence.



The staff working with Francis not only ensures his quality of life but they are also his family as his parents are deceased. Francis exhibits challenges when asked to demonstrate patience, such as when waiting to receive his medication or when he is waiting to attend day program but the bus hasn't arrived. Staff have learned and developed techniques to help Francis when he is feeling anxious.

On a typical day Francis is awakened by his 1:1 staff, Jerome S. (a single staff person required to keep Francis in close proximity at all times), showers and has breakfast with his fellow residents. He attends Little Flower's day program, located on the campus, between 9am – 1pm. He participates in daily recreation trips in the community, of which the movies are his favorite. When he returns home, Francis is encouraged to socialize with his peers, participate in activities like drawing and painting and helps staff with setting the dinner table.

All of Francis's daily needs are met by staff which can include daily grooming, socialization, therapeutic, and emotional levels. Jerome encourages Francis to choose his daily outfits, monitoring his ability to coordinate clothing appropriately. Jerome has been an asset as he has increased Francis' awareness of the importance of maintaining appropriate behavior whether on site or in the community and has been a great influence on Francis's overall demeanor. His guidance and genuine care for Francis is notable.

Most people might be surprised to find out that Francis is a registered voter, observes Jewish holidays and attends temple worship. He has also attended culinary arts school; he has a clear passion for food and enjoys watching staff prep and put meals together. In his spare time Francis enjoys painting abstract art. In fact, he has created drawings that are currently on display in both his residence and day program. He is also a very compassionate individual. When his peers are in the hospital, Francis checks in on them, sends messages, and wishes them a speedy recovery.

According to the Bishop's staff, *"Francis is funny and loves to make staff laugh; his hugs are priceless and endearing. He makes serving this unique population of exceptional people worthwhile and rewarding."*

Journey to Adulthood *(continued from cover)*

about was having my own apartment. I was lucky that I continued living with my aunt and nothing really changed in my day to day life, except now I had to pay rent. I felt pressure to come up with rent while living there and being in school full time, which made me anxious. A year later I got a call from Little Flower saying that my apartment was ready. It was what I always wanted to hear. I made the call immediately to check it out the next day and rushed over to the Queensbridge Houses.

I wasn't overly impressed by my studio apartment but just happy that I finally had a place to call home. It took a while for me to come up with the security deposit as by that point in my life I only had a part time job and my aunt wasn't lending me help. The first few days were a mix of euphoria, stress, and curiosity. I finally had an apartment!!! It was mine to paint, decorate, sleep in, keep the bathroom door open, whatever. I wanted to explore this neighborhood, Long Island City, and what it had to offer. How different it was from Brooklyn. I was also pretty stressed because I barely had enough money to live on until my next paycheck. All these mixed emotions carried over for some time while I adjusted to "adulthood."

One of the painful experiences was not

having furniture for the first four weeks. I would sleep on the floor with my spare blanket. The furniture company kept having delays in delivering my things (maybe because I lived in another borough?). While the compensation they gave me every time they failed to deliver came in handy, I really yearned for not just an appropriate place to put my head down at night but to also make it feel like a real home; not just a bare studio with a lot of garbage bags in my closet.

When I finally did receive my furniture I broke down and cried. The feeling of my apartment coming together was overwhelming. It's like a broken puzzle of missing pieces, never having a real home, moving around so much, and then you finally find the right pieces that connect the dots. Yes, it had quite a bit to improve, but the apartment finally felt alive. I'm happy to say that as time passed I have been able to add more items to make it feel much homier.

So where am I now? I currently work at the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence. I work as a Peer Educator, facilitating workshops about healthy relationships (and abusive ones) and what that entails. I've continued to do public



Anthony T. & VP, Medical and Mental Health, Dr. Melinda Konigsberg

speaking, particularly about my experiences in foster care and my journey as a Youth Advocate. I'm 25 and while I feel way more ahead than I ever thought I would be I still have so much to go! The position I was in as a helpless, traumatized young boy to an independent, responsible man has been a journey that hasn't always been fun. But it reminds me of where I came from and how much I still want to grow.

"You never know how strong you are, until being strong is the only choice you have."

Recognizing Heroes

Our foster parents are our greatest champions when it comes to caring and protecting youth in care. Mattie Simms, foster parent advocate, has provided hope, safety and love to countless children during her 30 years fostering. She was recognized for her passion and dedication at this year's Monsignor John T. Fagan Awards and had this to say about the important work she does.

"Being a foster parent to me is acting like a mother or father to someone, while encouraging and promoting their growth and development. Foster parenting is more than just housing and feeding a child. Foster parenting is understanding a child's situations, seeing past all of them and firmly believing in their potential.

Being a foster parent is having faith, faith that things will work out and faith that God can and will use you to positively affect a young person's life. Over my 30 years of fostering many children came through my home, each with a unique story.

Each and every child has potential. All they need is someone to encourage them, foster them, pray for them and give them love so that they can reach their potential."



Little Flower on the Pod

Our CEO, Corinne Hammons, had the pleasure of representing Little Flower as a guest on the *You Be You & I'll Be Me* podcast. The podcast is hosted by one of our dedicated donors, Jen Frank Kessenich, whose family involvement with Little Flower goes back generations! The conversation between Corinne and Jen spanned Little Flower's history, growth, current programs and services as well as our needs and expectations for the future. You can visit <https://youbeyouandillbeme.com/> to listen to the discussion in its entirety as well as the other phenomenal topics Jen covers!

HIA-LI Those Who Make a Difference Award

On Wednesday December 6th Little Flower was one of the recipients of the **Hauppauge Industrial Association of Long Island (HIA-LI) Those Who Make a Difference Award** at their year-end gala. It was a great honor to be recognized among our peers and a great opportunity to educate and inform members of the Long Island community about the important work we are doing. Little Flower is a proud HIA-LI member.

Strike a Chord Campaign

Little Flower was fortunate to be selected to participate in the New York public radio WFUV (90.7 FM) **Strike a Chord** campaign, which highlighted local organizations that support children in the foster care system and individuals interested in helping these children.

CEO, Corinne Hammons, and Foster Parent Advocate, Mattie Simms, were interviewed by WFUV radio to create two PSAs to recruit foster parents, which ran throughout February. Both Corinne and Mattie spoke eloquently and from the heart on the importance and need for dedicated and loving people to become foster parents.

We are so proud to join with our peers to help bring attention to this critical and important need and grateful for WFUV for sharing it with their listeners!



Thinking About Becoming a Foster Parent?

Caring for a child as a foster parent requires courage, hard work and love but can be a rewarding experience. The decision, however, to become a foster parent should not be taken lightly. If it is something that has crossed your mind, the below tips and guidelines, in addition to applications, extensive training and dedication, can help determine your next steps. For more information please call 1-800-323-0316 or email fosterparent@lfchild.org.

CONSIDER EVERY FAMILY MEMBER

Do you have enough space to comfortably accommodate your own family as well as a foster child? Think about the impact fostering will have on your own family dynamics and routine.



FINANCIAL STABILITY

Despite receiving a stipend for the child in your care, fostering will also have an impact on your finances if you are to properly care for a child, therefore you should be secure financially.



DETERMINATION

Every child deserves the chance to be a part of a family that will not give up on them and a family who will help them become the best they can be. Foster parents can make a positive difference in a child's life by being available and open to listening and helping.



PROVIDE A NURTURING ENVIRONMENT

There is no better gift to give a child than to provide him/her with a loving, nurturing family and a stable home where they can be loved and grow, and where they can learn to give love in return.



Recent Events



Holiday Tree Lighting

Little Flower staff, youth and adult residents were joined by neighbors and friends on Friday, December 1st to celebrate the beginning of the holiday season with the *3rd Annual Holiday Tree Lighting*. It was a warm, fun-filled community event on the Monsignor John T. Fagan campus. It was wonderful to see everyone celebrating one another and sharing in the warm and caring spirit that the season evokes. The hot chocolate was plentiful, the festive singing was soothing and of course, the tree lighting was spectacular!



Foster Care Holiday Party

On Thursday, December 14th Little Flower's foster families were treated to a special evening filled with arts and crafts, face painting, dancing and time with Santa!

The kids and their families had a fun-filled, easy going evening, providing a much needed break from their regular routines, which is most needed during this time of year!

We'd like to thank all of our volunteers for bringing Holiday cheer to the youngsters we serve, especially the students from the **School of Visual Arts** and to the staff and members of **Plymouth Church** for hosting.

LI HOGs Annual Toy Run

The children and adult residents of Little Flower welcomed the **Long Island Harley Owners Group (LI HOGs)** on Sunday, November 19th to its Monsignor John T. Fagan Campus. The LI HOGs continued their long standing tradition of collecting and delivering holiday presents to the residents of Little Flower.

We have been fortunate enough to receive the ongoing support of the LI HOGs and were thrilled to continue this great tradition! In what has come to be known as Little Flower's "Unofficial Kick-Off to the Holiday Season" and Long Island's longest and oldest toy run, the LI HOGs, after riding for over 25 miles arrived on the Msgr. Fagan campus in formation. The group, led by Santa, was followed by a parade of bikes filled with all sorts of goodies.

Robert "Bob" Brinka, Director of the LI HOGs, said that the members of the group and other supporting clubs are glad to continue the tradition of the Annual Toy Run to Little Flower. "Riding out on our motorcycles, led by Santa himself, not only puts smiles on the children at your [Little Flower's] facility but also puts tremendous smiles on the bikers themselves" said Bob.



Recent Events



L-R: L-Assemblyman Edward Ra, Chief Executive Officer Corinne Hammons & Senator Martin Golden;
M- Senator Kenneth LaValle & CEO Corinne Hammons; R- Steve Moll, Island Public Affairs,
Assemblywoman Kimberly Jean-Pierre, Brandon Cunningham, CEO Corinne Hammons & Chief Program Officer Alissa Deakin

Albany Legislative Event

Earlier this year, Little Flower had the honor of spending the day in our State Capitol meeting with our local representatives. We met one-on-one with legislators or their staff introducing our programs and services to them and informing them of the work we do in the communities they represent. In the evening, we hosted a small reception for representatives and their staff to learn more about Little Flower. We would like to thank **Senators: Kenneth LaValle, John Flanagan, Leroy Comrie** and **Martin Golden** and **Assemblymembers: Kimberly Jean-Pierre, Edward Ra** and **Luis Sepulveda** for taking time out of their busy day getting to know Little Flower and attending the reception!

2018 Monsignor John T. Fagan Awards

Thursday, May 10th, we gathered at the Pfizer Building, which will soon house our combined Brooklyn and Queens offices. The 2018 Msgr. John T. Fagan Awards celebrated Little Flower's 88 years of serving adults, families and children in need.

We honored a devoted foster parent and advocate, Mattie Simms, and the core group of caring and generous Long Island families who have been a sustaining force of Little Flower for years.

The night was a true testament to Father Quinn and Father Fagan's humanitarian vision. Little Flower continues to serve children at risk and adults with developmental disabilities in New York City and across Long Island.

Little Flower's CEO, Corinne Hammons said, "We are living in uncertain times. And that impacts all of our institutions, our outlook on the world, even one's ability to hope for a better life. Our staff and my Executive team—regularly go above and beyond. I am so grateful for all the ways they turn caring into action for those we serve."



Vice President, Family Foster Care, Janet Greaves and Service Awardee, Mattie Simms



Chief Financial Officer, Kevin Kundmueller, Chief Program Officer, Alissa Deakin, Chief Executive Officer, Corinne Hammons and the Founding Families



*Children and Family
Services of New York*

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SAVE THE DATE

Thursday, July 12, 2018 – First Responders Day

Monsignor John T. Fagan Campus, Wading River, NY

Visit our website and Facebook page for details in the coming months.

Monday, September 17, 2018 – 2018 Annual Golf Outing

Engineers Country Club, Roslyn Harbor, NY

Honoring: *Peter Armstrong Egan, Partner, Nixon Peabody*

For more information, contact Shanice Branch at 718-875-3500 ext. 5155 or at branches@lfchild.org.

Help Make a Difference in the Lives of those We Serve

If you would like to make a donation, please make checks payable to:

Little Flower Children and Family Services of New York

Kindly mail to: Little Flower, Development Office, 2450 North Wading River Road, Wading River, NY 11792

Donations can also be made online at: littleflowerny.thankyou4caring.org