



## **Kids These Days: Power of the Story**

One of my earliest memories as a young boy was the delight I discovered in reading stories – everything from the big book of Bible stories in my grandparents’ home, to the Hardy Boy books my father would bring home to me every time he went away on a business trip, to the novels I’d later study in school. There are no Powerpoints, graphs, charts, reports or statistical analyses that can impact a person so powerfully as a story told with conviction and passion. That's why the greatest teachers use stories to wrap up truth in such a way that it is more easily understood by the listener.

Stories still have the power to move and inspire me. Recently I attended a conference that buzzed with stories about some extraordinary people: our annual Building Futures Together Conference that brought together nearly 150 foster parents, adoptive parents and kinship families to learn from experts and from each other on how to support the children in their care. Their stories are remarkable.

By way of example, for more than 40 years, foster parents Pat and Ed Brown have opened their home to hundreds of children, many of whom came to them in the middle of the night when they were rescued from high-risk situations. Another young woman, Jody Pelechytik, whose biological parents also fostered children, shared her perspective of what it was like to watch her own parents’ love and care for someone else’s children - and what it taught her about compassion and generosity. She wants to foster children herself one day. And Patrick Vassalo, a former teen in care, said that because his foster family gave him such love and stability, it inspired him to become a caseworker with Child and Family Services. He now helps other vulnerable children find the same care and support.

When Pat, Judy, and Patrick shared their story in free air time offered by local radio stations during last year’s Foster Parent Appreciation Week, the number of inquiries to our Foster Parent inquiry line actually tripled. Their words echoed with such sincerity and conviction that it caused others to consider what they might be able to do in supporting kids in need at any given point in time.

We thank all the caregivers in our region who are looking after children and youth so faithfully each day, helping them weave their own success stories - and thereby create a future filled with promise and opportunity. Their stories illustrate the value of the work we do and the impact it is having on both individuals and our society.

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