



# MAY IS NATIONAL FOSTER CARE AWARENESS MONTH



## CFG RESIDENCY OUTREACH RESOURCE LIBRARY

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**CARMELYN VEDAR**  
**RESIDENCY OUTREACH MANAGER**  
**CFG HEALTH NETWORK**

**"LOVE HER LIKE YOUR OWN." I DIDN'T NEED  
TO BE REMINDED OF THIS. "**

**By Carmelyn Vedar**

It's what came easy and naturally. But when you are first starting out on a foster care journey, there are courses you need to take to better understand what it takes to be a foster family.

It was a Friday. I had plans for a neighbor's BBQ that night. The following day, we had plans to meet up with family in NYC. Instead, she arrived, and those plans changed. A lot changed. Four days old and straight from the hospital, she came home with the clothes she was wearing, a blanket, and those little formula bottles. No diapers. I have three boys of my own, so I know that having diapers is pretty important. But we'll make it work, and we did.

The intake worker said it was hard to leave the hospital because mom wouldn't let go. Security was involved, police arrived. I got nervous that mom would try to find me or, even worse - that she may try to harm my own family. I was assured my identity would not be disclosed. My attention goes back to her mom but in a different way. I start to feel her pain, how her heart must have been ripped out of her chest when she was told she couldn't take her baby home. And I realize that I would be that mom too, security and all if someone were to take one of my babies from me.

## "EVEN IN A CASE OF A LOVING FOSTER HOME WHERE THE CHILD THRIVES, LOVE IS NOT ENOUGH TO KEEP HER. "

My focus shifts again to this beautiful girl – her innocence, her not knowing how tragic things have been just in her four days of life, her being in a stranger's home, not knowing what kind of care she'll get. Her well-being is controlled by the state now, not mom or dad. And it's my responsibility as the caregiver chosen to help make things better. But am I capable? Am I ready to this all over again with a newborn? Will my boys feel neglected? Am I enough?

I ask the worker, Can I take pictures of her and share them with my family? "Of course! She's yours now. Treat her like you would your other kids." I take pictures, about a million of them. I didn't want to miss anything. I wanted to share them with mom one day because that's what I would have liked to be a part of if I had to miss any of her first days. So I hold her a lot. And I pray that she would at least feel secure. I barely sleep – is she breathing, is she crying, is she hungry? What will her brothers think when they meet her? Do I have enough formula for her? So many racing thoughts, and this was just day one.

Baby girl thrives here. For six months, we spoil her rotten. "Mom, can I hold her?!" My boys argue who gets to hold her next. "How did we get the cutest baby out there?" my boys wonder. I often wondered the same thing. Her mom never missed a visit either. In rain or snow, she would often walk to see her baby for the 2 hours they allow her three times a week. I was proud of mom, but I also had a feeling that mom would probably never get custody. She had a lot going on. And sometimes, love is not enough.

A paternal aunt wanted her, and family always takes priority. I knew that. But it was still tough for me to accept. I asked for time. I needed enough notice to plan for the emotions – not just mine, but everyone who grew to love this smiley baby. How could I do this to my family? I took in a child for everyone to love, only to have her taken away by a stranger. Security didn't need to be called. I had no right to keep her here. I'm just a foster mom. It should have been, "love her like your own until we tell you otherwise."

Even in a case of a loving foster home where the child thrives, love is not enough to keep her. It was a Friday. And she went home to be with family. I cried like a baby, but I knew I wouldn't have changed a thing. I hurt because I loved. She was a child that needed a little more than others. And my family gave her that. And these feelings – the love and the hurt – it's what makes me feel fulfilled; it's why I chose this journey.

It's Friday again, a week later. I barely catch up on my sleep. Another baby girl arrives straight from the hospital. My kids were hesitant at first. "I'm not going to give her that many kisses because her next family is just going to take them away when they take her back." My kids are still hurt. The walls are up. But then we see how much she needs us too. And then I hear, "I think I'm going to love her as much as I loved before. That's what makes us a good foster family". And I'm reminded that my own kids are learning the best lessons in life.

**Carmelyn Vedar**  
**Residency Outreach Manager**  
**CFG Health Network**  
**Cell: 215-681-5280**  
**cvedar@cfgpc.com**  
**www.cfghealthnetwork.com**



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