

Scan the code to learn about foster care!

“Spare Room for a Teen” by Crista Jakacky, AFfME Marketing and Communications Specialist

Emily and Peter Fitzgerald are a young couple living in Bucksport, Maine. They have six children and are very active in their community. They are also Resource Parents. They have provided respite and foster care for several children over the last few years, and they adopted their teenage son Dmitry in 2021.

“My mother was living with us,” Peter said, “and she eventually built a tiny house on our land.”

“We looked at each other and both basically said, ‘We know what we’re going to do with that room, we’re going to put someone in it!’” Emily told us.

The couple started their licensing process with a purpose; they wanted to adopt a teenager.

“Older children are so undervalued,” Peter said, “and we focused on teens because they have a hard time finding placements and being able to stay there. If you think it’s all going to be sunshine and roses, it’s important to have reasonable expectations.”

“But no matter what the hardships are, you don’t regret it,” Emily added.

Recent Kids Count data showed more than 2,000 children in foster care in Maine, and nearly 100 were teens who aged out of foster care without lifelong connections. The state passed legislation in 2022 allowing youth to receive support until age 23, but leaving foster care without permanent family connections adversely affects their well-being. They are more likely to experience homelessness, joblessness, early parenthood and substance abuse (2023 Maine Kids Count Data Book).

Not only were the Fitzgeralds fostering teenagers, but they were also passionate about helping youth with developmental delays or who had experienced trauma. “We wanted to help youth who were difficult to place,” Emily said.

Dmitry came to the Fitzgeralds when he was 16. It only took a few months for them all to decide to make it permanent. He is now 18 and participates in an internship. He loves to volunteer with the school custodians.

Resource homes for teenagers are urgently needed, but so are families for youth in care with higher needs.

According to Alternative Family Services:

- Approximately 7% of children in foster care have an intellectual disability and they are around 1.9 times more likely to be in the foster care system.
- Around 7-10% of children in foster care have autism or are on the autism spectrum and they are around 2.4 times more likely to be in the foster care system.
- Eight out of every 10 foster youth enter the foster care system with notable mental health needs.

The Fitzgeralds explained that they have experience with special needs, as two of their biological children have autism, and Peter is also on the spectrum.

“We have a lot of autism in the house,” Emily said, chuckling.

“I really don’t think it affects me at all, though,” Peter replied, while the couple both laughed.

That sense of humor is how they tackle challenges and handle everyday life. It’s also how they connected with Dmitry.

When asked how they knew they were a match Peter said, “His smile, and he was nerdy and ridiculous, which is basically how we describe our entire family.”

“He was a total Fitzgerald!” said Emily, accompanied again by the couple’s infectious laughter.

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Do you have the skills and experience to care for children needing emotional, behavioral and/or developmental supports?

Sadly, children with these issues are overrepresented in the foster care population. The need for foster and adoptive families who are willing and able to parent these children is greatly needed!

Join the families like the Fitzgeralds’ who have the love and understanding to parent children that face these challenges.

Maine Heart Gallery Spotlight



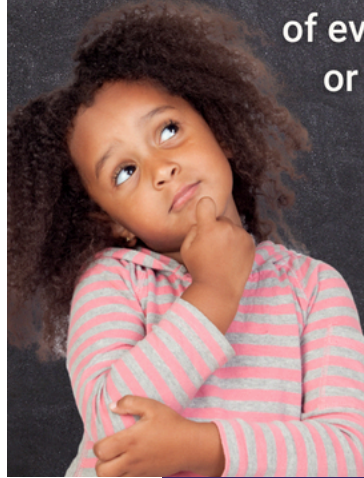
Jacob D.O.B. 2012

Jacob likes animals, board games, and exploring the outdoors.

Visit the Maine Heart Gallery at:
afamilyformemaine.org/heart-gallery

Curious about foster care?

Join us on **zoom** the 2nd Monday of every month at noon or 6 pm to learn more!



These sessions aren’t part of the licensing process.

They are casual, informational discussions.

You can ask questions, or just sit in and listen!

Feb 10th
March 10th
April 14th



Register HERE

Or on the events page at
afamilyformemaine.org

A
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for **ME**

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