

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STARK COUNTY FOSTER PARENTS PRESENTED FAMILY OF THE YEAR AWARD

Canton, Ohio - The Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) presented Stark County foster parents, Aaron and Julie Johnson, with the 2023 Family of the Year award on Wednesday, September 20, 2023 during their annual conference in Columbus, Ohio. The Johnsons have been a licensed foster care family with Stark County Job & Family Services' Division of Children Services since April 2020.

According to the PCSAO, the Family of the Year award "recognizes families who are making a difference in the lives of children involved in the child protection system. They may be foster or adoptive families, kinship caregivers, or primary or biological families who have dedicated their lives, opened their homes, and overcome challenges to ensure safety and permanence for children."

"In the short amount of time that Aaron and Julie Johnson have been caregivers with our agency, they have made a significant impact on the lives of so many children," said Tricia Mayle, Deputy Director of the Division of Children Services. "Not only have they opened their home as foster parents and given permanency through adoption, but they have also provided emergency and respite care to children in need of a temporary place to stay until they could be reunited with family or placed long-term. They are truly deserving of this award."

Aaron and Julie Johnson became licensed foster parents in 2020, during a time when many foster families stopped accepting placements due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the risk of being exposed to the virus, the Johnsons opened their home to children in need. They became invaluable to the Division of Children Services as they accepted more challenging placements, such as large sibling groups and older youth, and were available all hours of the day.

"When families were saying no to new placements, Aaron and Julie said yes. They are foster parents who have the desire to provide security, comfort, and kindness to those who need it most," said Jamie Horey, Program Administrator in the Division of Children Services. "They treat each child like they are their own. Even when children are only in their home for a short time, Aaron and Julie develop a supportive and caring relationship with them."

In 2022, the Johnsons fostered a sibling group of three children that eventually led to permanency through adoption. Looking to devote more time to their family, Aaron and Julie transitioned from long-term foster caregivers to emergency and respite caregivers. In this role, they worked with the Division of Children Services to provide short-term care to children in need.

When staff called the Johnsons, they were always there to help. They accepted 19 emergency and respite care placements over the year. Many came to them after caseworkers worked for hours to establish a safe plan for the child and identify a place for them to stay. Aaron and Julie were able to provide care until a family member or permanent placement could become available.

"The Johnsons have been such an asset to Stark County, now more than ever," said Mayle. "Our community has been experiencing a significant decrease in available foster homes since the pandemic, while the number of children in foster care is growing. We need more foster parents who have the same dedication and desire to help as Aaron and Julie."

For additional information about the PCSAO's annual conference, visit [PCSAO.org](https://www.pcsao.org). To learn how to become a foster parent in Stark County, call 330-451-8789 or visit [StarkJFS.org](https://www.StarkJFS.org).

