

Abigail Bell

Children's Permanency Partnership
Nominated by Linda Middleton

"She is the epitome of an adoption specialist."

Abigail Bell goes the "extra mile" for children and her co-workers. Well-respected in the adoption community, she is always enthusiastic about what she does and truly conveys that every child is adoptable. Abby does not complain about any job responsibilities. In fact, she puts a positive spin on the most arduous of tasks. She is calm and professional in the most difficult of situations. Abby cares about her co-workers



and does what she can to help them. Though she carries a large caseload, she manages to be organized, timely on her paperwork/reports and is astute about agency policy and procedures. She makes sure that all members of a staffing team are acknowledged and their voices are heard. She tries to be proactive even when the best of plans have failed. Abby has the courage to stand up for what she

believes and has a true respect for diversity. Abby is empathetic, caring and compassionate. She truly shows a "passion" for the children and families in the adoption arena.

Edna Green

Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition
Nominated by Cisely Beard

"Her boundless energy gives hope to children who have been in foster care for years."

Edna Green is relentless when it comes to finding forever families for children in foster care, specifically older youth and sibling groups. She will not stop until she finds a home for every child on her caseload. In the agency, she is known as "the closer." When looking for family of children in foster

care, she knows no bounds. She has contacted small-town newspapers and funeral homes to find family members. She knocks on doors and works with relatives to create a forever family for the children for whom she works. She still doesn't rest when she's placed a child. She once flew to Oregon to visit children whom she recently placed with a family there. She wanted to see and hear with her own eyes that the children were thriving.



Jennifer LaVelle

Missouri Children's Division
Nominated by Hisako O'Rourke

"She is a "go-to person" within the agency."

With 27 years at the Children's Division, Jennifer LaVelle has a wealth of knowledge and often is asked to offer assistance to her co-workers, which she willingly does. In 2012, she was promoted to subsidy unit supervisor at the St. Louis County office. She now oversees seven subsidy workers, whose duties include but are not limited to negotiating adoption/legal guardianship subsidy packages, connecting families to com-



munity resources and handling urgent situations. It is challenging to manage this group of strong women with diverse personalities and backgrounds. However, Jennifer guides and leads her workers in supportive and creative ways. She has an open mind, is flexible, and will fight for her workers' needs. In working with families, Jennifer also offers a supportive and caring manner. Jennifer is an accomplished

photographer who offers her service at the St. Louis Family Court Adoption Saturday event, as well as Foster Parent Appreciation Day for St. Louis County foster families.

Edward Vazquez

St. Louis Family Court
Nominated by Michael Gregory

"His compassion and integrity for the less fortunate and his drive to make a difference are exemplary."

Over his 30 years with the Family Court, Edward Vazquez has been consistent and determined in ensuring that the court dispenses justice in a fair and impartial manner. As a deputy juvenile officer, he has compassion and empathy for the families that come before the court. He investigates all his cases fully so he can give the court accurate and true infor-

mation. The children assigned to him are not just numbers, he spends time to get to know them and their families. Ed worked with one family for 10 years, refusing to give up until the parent finally did all the things that she needed to do to return her four children to her care. He visits the homes and facilities where children are placed, to ensure that the children are well taken care of.

Ed always supports the annual children's winter festival by making contribution and donations so the children can have a good Christmas.



Lynn Zollicofer

Missouri Baptist Children's Home
Nominated by Kathy Woods and Jessica Rack

"Lynn sees the potential in all of the children with whom she works and helps them to see it within themselves."

Lynn Zollicofer cares about the children and families she serves. She spends a lot of time with her families and works many hours into the evening and even on weekends. She displays initiative, attitude and determination to be there for the families she serves. As Missouri Baptist Children's Home's designated "Drug Court" worker completing special training in this area, she enjoys working with and advocating for her



clients who have addiction issues. She supports staff with her expertise in drug-related issues. Over the years, she has worked with some very challenging teenagers and has been a great help and support to them. The agency considers her a wonderful member of their Family Foster Care Team. Lynn has two young men on her caseload who will be starting college this fall. She assisted in ensuring

that these children would graduate from high school when there were concerns that they wouldn't make it due to roadblocks they were facing, both within and outside of themselves.

STEPPING UP FOR KIDS 2015 HONOREES: RESOURCE FAMILIES

Ramona Brooks

Nominated by Maren Mellem

"Ramona saw in me the potential others didn't, and what I failed to see in myself at times."

Ramona Brooks is a foster parent of five and the mother of two adult children who also foster. She is a tireless advocate for children in foster care.

About her work, she says, "The most rewarding thing is seeing the changes kids make and be part of it, particularly a child who has behavioral issues. Completing their education is the most important thing we can help them achieve."



Ramona's inspiration to foster parent is affirmed by a young woman, Stacey, who came to Ramona as a pregnant teenager recently kicked out of her home. Stacey tells of Ramona's impact: "When I met Ramona, I was a lost kid with baggage. She looked past my hurt, insecurities, shame and the baby I had. She opened her heart and home to embrace us. She never let anyone say we were anything but family. She always told me she loved us no matter what. She became the mother I never had. She was my support and my lifeline when I was at a breaking point. She made confiding in her easy. When we had discussions, she never passed judgement. She always saw my mistakes as lessons and navigated me to do the right thing. She inspires me to be a better woman, daughter, and mother. Because of Ramona, my Mom, I know the definition of family is not a group of people who share the same blood, but the people who support you in your time no matter what."

Tiffany and Robert Slouffman

Nominated by Laurie Clark-Huber

"This family has taken this little boy and gave him an opportunity to thrive to the best of his capability and provided him with an environment where he can be at peace to enjoy his life."

Tiffany and Robert Slouffman have been foster parents for only about two years, but during that time have cared for a unique child with severe medical needs. With sometimes as many as six medical appointments a month for him, Tiffany and Robert work together to ensure that one of them will be at the appointments. They have taken this child on family trips both in state and out of state with their own biological children. Tiffany and Robert strongly believe in reunification; they have asked the mother to come to the doctors' appointments and have been mentoring the mother on how to care for her son. There have been times when the child has been hospitalized due to his medical needs and at least one of the

Slouffmans was at the child's bedside 24/7. Unfortunately, the child is now on hospice and the Slouffmans continue to ensure he receives the best medical attention and support.

About their service as foster parents, Tiffany and Robert said, "Our calling to become foster parents came from our desire to follow Jesus'



instructions in the Bible to care for the orphans and the helpless in the world. It's rewarding to know we are teaching our biological children at a very young age to care for others. It's also a privilege to be able to help a young child learn that a troubled past doesn't mean a troubled future."