

Fostering Excellence Awards

UCP Seguin offers various programs and services for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and specialized foster care for children with complex medical, behavioral, and emotional needs. To support these individuals, we rely on dedicated individuals and families to become Foster Parents.

For children, the individuals become a place of nurturing and love in times of disruption. For adults, foster parents take on the role of family member as they provide support and care for a wide range of disabilities and needs. Foster parents are the backbone of UCP Seguin. The work they do can often go unnoticed, so we wanted to shine a light on these amazing people and the incredible work they do.

For these inaugural awards, we have chosen 5 individuals who are ultimate examples of Foster Parenting. They are individuals we can rely on when we need a loving home for someone in our care.



What is an Adult Foster Parent you might ask? A friend. A caregiver. A nurse. A companion. A shoulder to lean on. An ear to talk to. They are family. This is Larry Yaus. He does not take the place of the families of the men in his care, he adds to them.

Since July of 1996, Larry has dedicated himself to caring for UCP Seguin participants. In his nearly 30 years at UCP Seguin, Larry has not taken a single vacation. Instead, he commits himself to the participants in his home.

The men in Larry's care are VERY different. They have different physical abilities, they have different communication styles, they require different levels of care. But Larry understands them all. He knows when something is wrong with Dan, Roosevelt, or Ken without them saying a word. He surrounds them with fun, care, and safety and will do anything to make them happy. 3437 S. 61st Avenue is not a house, it's a home. For the families of Larry's guys, "he's a gift."

In the good times and the bad, Larry is there. In all his years at UCP Seguin, just 5 men have come under Larry's care. When individuals come to live with Larry, they stay with Larry. Under his watchful eye, Carl and Gene passed in peace and comfort.



Where were you in 1987? On August 4th, Lisa joined the UCP Seguin team as a program supervisor. Lisa loved having a positive impact on the lives of the people we served and when the Adult Foster Parent program began in 1989, Lisa decided to dedicate her time there.

Lisa's first charges were Jose, Richard, and brothers John and Sebastian. In addition to building a home for these 4 gentlemen, most of whom did not have family support, Lisa was guardian to another individual named Sandy. Lisa has devoted her life to caring for people with disabilities. She has never shied away from taking on even the most challenging cases. She is always committed to "her guys" supporting Jose, Richard, John, and Sebastian during the end of their lives.

In addition to running her home in Stickney, Lisa has given her time as a volunteer with our Special Olympics athletes. She has led discussions on caregiver burnout in partnership with Riverside Township and participated in videos for the State of Illinois highlighting the benefits of transitioning individuals from state institutions to community-based settings.

When the Jacksonville Developmental Center closed, Lisa welcomed former residents into her loving home. She showed them what life was like as part of a family, taking them on weekend trips to her cottage for fishing and fun.

For 37 years, Lisa has created a family with the men in her home. Today, Lisa's "guys" include David, Keith, and Mike. According to Keith's sister Nancy, "Lisa Vito is the rarest of human beings! She is platinum, gold, diamonds, and emeralds all forged together with rays of sunshine." It takes a special soul to live day in and day out with endless perseverance and, sometimes, barely any breaths of calm.



It takes special people to become foster parents. Especially when the youth in their care have challenging behaviors, complex medical conditions, or have suffered severe trauma. For more than 20 years, Georgina and Francisco Salmeron have opened their home to just such children in need.

The Salmeron's never give up on a child. They are committed to understanding each child's specific needs and supporting them through tough times. Georgina and Francisco are fierce advocates for ensuring that the schools and the community provide all the resources their children need and deserve. Their dedication to the children in their care extends to their biological families, even driving them out of state for family visits.

The Salmeron home is a loving, nurturing, and supportive place for every child that passes through its doors. The children in their care are family in every sense of the word, adding to the love and joy of their biological children. After 20 years of compassionate care, Georgina and Francisco are about to make their family complete. The 4 children currently in their home will become permanent members of the Salmeron family later this year.

Althea Ray-Toolie and Micah made a lasting imprint on each other's lives. When Micah needed a new foster home Ms. Toolie was there with open arms. Micah's needs were many – diagnosed with Lupus and Renal Failure among other conditions – and she was tired of being sick and shuffling from foster home to foster home.



That's where Althea stepped in. She didn't think twice when welcoming Micah into her home. She made sure Micah attended every doctor's appointment, attended dialysis 3 times a week, received necessary infusions every 6 months, AND attended school via Zoom.

Micah blossomed with Althea. At 15 years old, she learned to read nutrition labels to make appropriate choices, monitor her fluid intake, and take her medications on time. Her health steadily improved with Althea always by her side.

Being young and sick is not fun. Ms. Toolie made sure Micah's life was filled with joy. She applied to Make-a-Wish, where the family was awarded a trip to Orlando to visit Disney World and Sea World. Micah attended a children's summer camp for kidney patients through Lurie Children's Hospital so she could enjoy a childhood rite of passage while still receiving dialysis. Ms. Toolie put Micah first and Micah responded with laughter and love.

Unfortunately, Ms. Toolie's love and support couldn't cure Micah's illnesses. This past month, Micah left this world for a place free from illness and pain, and Althea was at her side. Just like always.