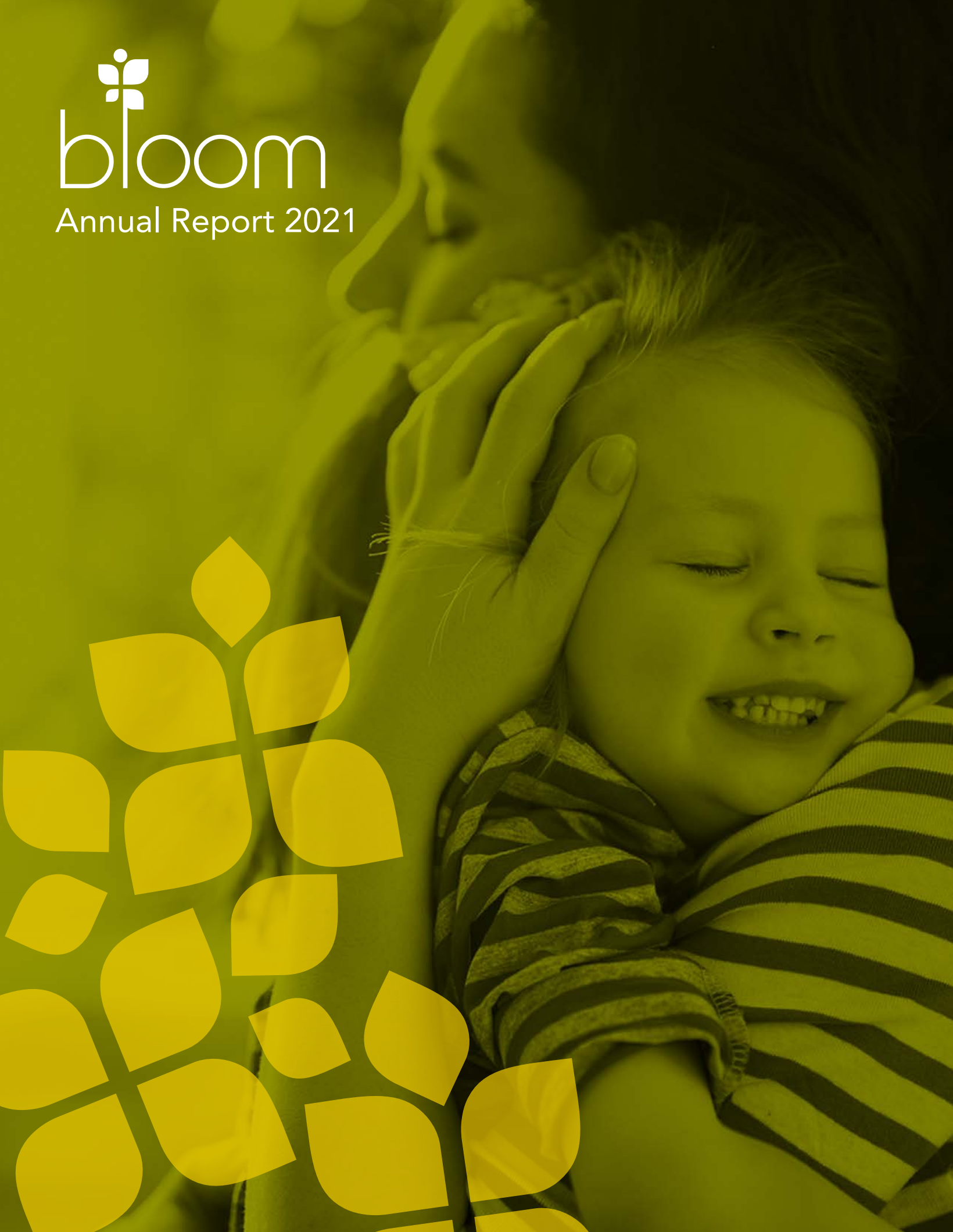
# bloom

## Annual Report 2021



# ANNUAL REPORT 2021

“NO AMOUNT OF SOCIAL DISTANCE COULD KEEP US FROM HELPING FOSTER KIDS.”

The collective tumult of the past year has taught us how precious family is, no matter how we define that group of people. At Bloom, everything we do is centered around our desire to strengthen families and create a safe nest where children can thrive. High on our list of priorities towards achieving this goal is: keeping siblings together (we have a 92% success rate!); reuniting children with their birth families whenever possible; providing foster families with key supports and evidence-based training to facilitate healing for traumatized children; working with kinship families so foster children can stay within their family unit; and equipping foster children with the clothing and essentials they need so that they can put their best foot forward. These are just a few of the “ingredients” on our list that help make a difference in the lives of Georgia’s foster children.

One of the most important “ingredients,” however, is YOU! We could not provide such high-quality services without YOUR commitment to the vulnerable children we serve every day. Whether you become licensed as a Bloom foster parent, serve as volunteer in The Bloom Closet, send in a monetary donation through our website or advocate for the needs of foster children, your help is needed now more than ever before! We appreciate you more than you will ever know, and we are humbled and honored by your support.

Stay tuned... we have more exciting news that will be announced in the months to come!

Sincerely,

Becky Davenport

Becky Davenport, CEO

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# Serving Children During COVID-19

## Meeting the Emergency Needs of Foster Kids

Despite the worldwide pandemic, 4,114 foster children received free clothing, supplies, and essential items through The Bloom Closet in 2020. Throughout the year, 90,701 items were distributed to foster children–all at no cost. During each visit to The Bloom Closet, foster children who often had no belongings at all were provided with clean, comfortable clothing and basic necessities such as toiletries and school supplies. In response to the immediate needs of foster children, The Bloom Closet collaborated with metro-Atlanta DFCS offices and group homes to make deliveries of clothing and supplies. The Bloom Closet also implemented a touch-free, curbside pick-up service for Bloom Closet shoppers and began hosting "Sidewalk Giveaway" days, where foster families pre-register to safely shop for items on-site in Bloom's parking lot, while observing social distancing and wearing masks.

Bloom's new Volunteer & Donation Center, which was completed in fall 2019, allowed for an increase in storage capacity for donations and additional volunteer work space. As a result, The Bloom Closet was able to collect 17,205 bags of donations and utilize 3,817 volunteer hours to operate the program.

Moving forward, The Bloom Closet will continue to offer safe shopping options, through curbside, touch-free pick-up, delivery, and sidewalk giveaways. Although the COVID-19 crisis changed Bloom's service delivery methods, foster parents agree that The Bloom Closet is an essential resource for foster children. In a survey conducted in December 2020, 85% of foster parents felt that curbside pick-up service was very helpful during the pandemic.

*"I can't thank you enough for offering curbside pick-up at The Bloom Closet! What a blessing you've been!"*

*- Foster Parent ("The Bloom Closet Survey" Dec. 2020)*

# 4,208

**Foster Children's Lives Impacted by Bloom**

Established in 1986, Bloom Our Youth is a family-centered, non-profit organization that protects, supports, and empowers foster children and the families who care for them.

## Program Impact

*Making a Difference*

**90,701**

*essential daily living items provided to foster children within 12 months.*

**3,871**

*hours of volunteer service donated to help foster children thrive in 2020.*

## Measurable Outcomes

*Positive Effects of The Bloom Closet*

**97%** *of foster parents report that The Bloom Closet has improved their ability to provide basic needs for the foster children in their care.*

**95%** *of foster children report feeling prepared for school after receiving clothing and supplies from The Bloom Closet.*

**95%** *of foster children report increased self-worth after receiving clothing and supplies from The Bloom Closet.*

**92%** *of participants who attended Bloom's volunteer orientation reported an increased knowledge of the crisis needs of foster children.*

*Stay tuned for the latest news when The Bloom Closet Express makes it's maiden voyage this year!*

# THE BLOOM CLOSET EXPRESS

## Hitting the Streets to Serve More Kids

Although The Bloom Closet is located in Fayette County, 73% of the foster children served through the program reside in metro-Atlanta's defined 10-county area. Because of their location, some foster children in metro-Atlanta face barriers that prevent them from accessing Bloom's brick-and-mortar store. The Bloom Closet program's newest traveling counterpart, called "The Bloom Closet Express," is designed to break down the geographic barriers faced by foster youth and foster families and allow Bloom to increase social well-being among foster children in metro-Atlanta for years to come.

This exciting new program operates out of a 20' Morgan Olson truck that transforms into an open-air boutique for foster children. In August 2020, Bloom received a $100,000 grant from Ribbons of Hope in Atlanta to purchase and outfit of the truck with clothing racks, storage benches, a dressing room, and more. At the time of this printing, The Bloom Closet Express has been shipped from the Ford plant in Michigan and is currently on the production line at Food Trucks South in Marietta, GA. The design team at Food Trucks South is currently working on transforming the bare truck into an exciting "store-on-wheels." The Bloom Closet Express brings The Bloom Closet's colorful, whimsical, and upbeat atmosphere directly to foster children in underserved areas of metro-Atlanta. Shopping at The Bloom Closet Express encourages dignity and self-worth, since the truck looks like a fun and exciting store and is filled with high-quality and desirable items.

A trip to The Bloom Closet is often the first step towards rebuilding trust with caring adults and improving the child's self-worth. Countless times there have been foster children who arrive at Bloom with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Similar to The Bloom Closet, the children who utilize The Bloom Closet Express will receive clothing and everyday necessities for basic hygiene and social well-being (undergarments, toiletries, school supplies), as well as items that provide emotional comfort and joy during a difficult time (teddy bears, books, games).

Currently, Bloom coordinates with DFCS offices and group homes to deliver much-needed clothing and supplies to foster families in the areas of greatest need. During the first year of operation, The Bloom Closet Express will focus on five counties in metro Atlanta (Fulton County, Dekalb County, Gwinnett County, Cobb County, and Douglas County). In addition to partnering with DFCS Offices to identify foster children in need, Bloom is also partnering with other Child Because of the support of our donors, this program will provide comfort and joy to foster children in metro-Atlanta and beyond in the coming years!

*In August, Ribbons of Hope in Atlanta donated $100,000 to purchase The Bloom Closet Express truck. Thank you!*

## Wish List

Bloom accepts donations for The Bloom Closet and The Bloom Closet Express at our Volunteer and Donation Center, located at 115 Marquis Dr., Fayetteville, GA 30214. Please visit our website at bloomouryouth.org for more information on how to donate.

- New or gently used shoes and clothing (size infant through teen)
- Pajamas
- Socks and underwear (new)
- Winter jackets, mittens, and hats
- Diaper wipes and diapers
- Baby powder, lotion, diaper rash ointment, infant shampoo
- Baby Gear (diaper bags, infant carriers, baby swings, cribs, etc.)
- Baby blankets, baby linens
- Baby bottles, sippy cups, bibs, pacifiers (new)
- Full-size toiletries such as toothpaste, shampoo, deodorant, soap
- Books and toys for babies, children and teens
- School Supplies
- Gift Cards to Wal-Mart, Target, and Amazon

# From Foster Care to College

## A Teen Foster Mom Reaches for the Stars

One foster youth whose life has been greatly impacted this past year by Bloom is Adrianna, a single teen mom who has been in Bloom's Foster Care program since 2017. In addition to becoming a mother at 15 years old, Adrianna was severely traumatized—she was molested as a child and later witnessed a tragic family event involving her father.

When Adrianna's father was incarcerated, she and her newborn child were referred to Bloom's Foster Care program. Before Adrianna was accepted into Bloom's program, she was not on track to graduate high school and she struggled with drug abuse. With the support of her Bloom foster parent, Ms. Alesia Huff (pictured on the top right), Adrianna was able to stabilize her life. The Bloom Closet provided Adrianna with school-appropriate clothing, school supplies and toiletries. She was also given necessities for her infant—diapers, formula, clothing, and baby gear.

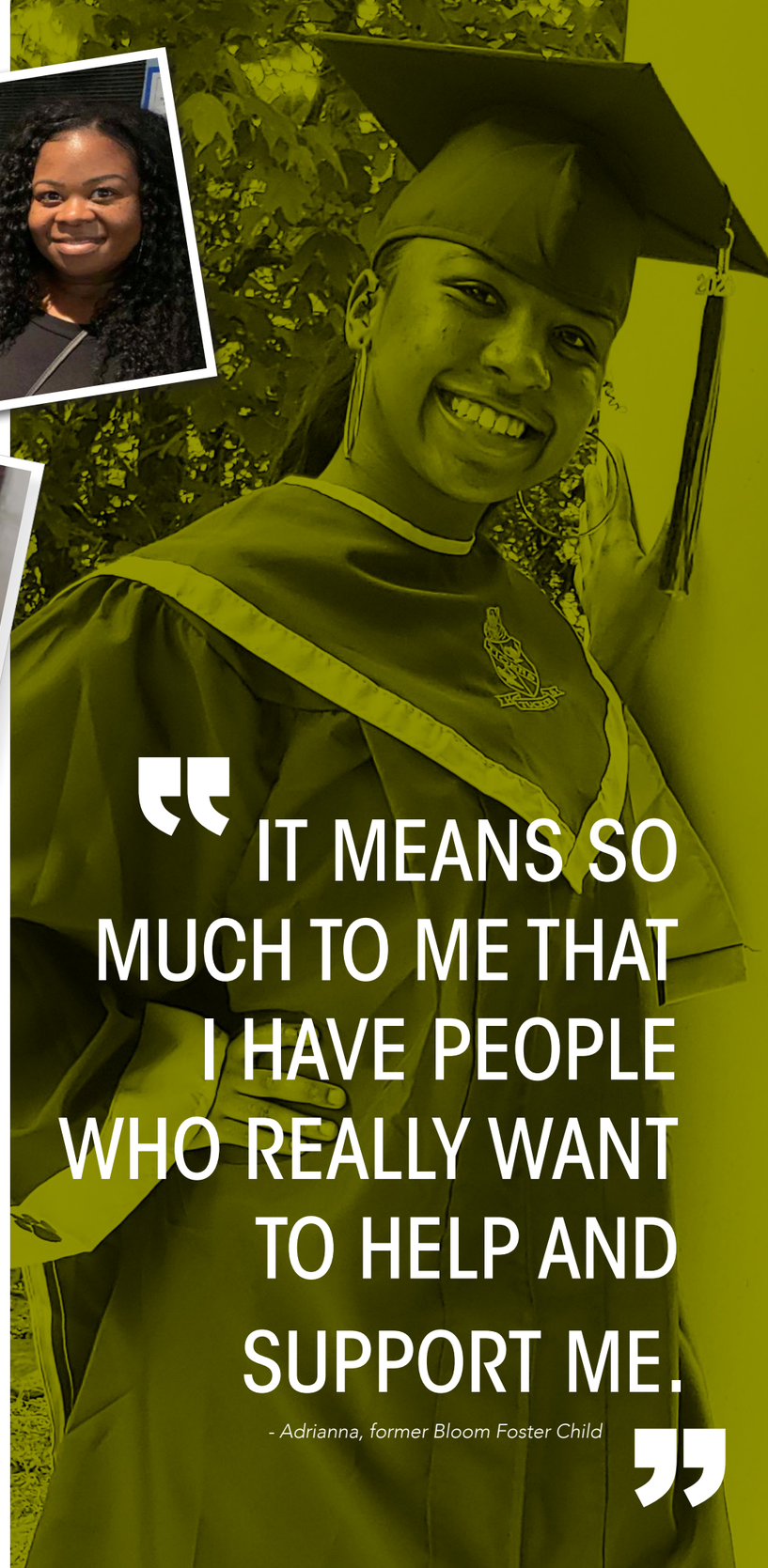
Bloom was able to arrange for individual counseling for Adrianna to work though the emotional trauma she had endured, in addition to bolstering her academics by providing a tutor and SAT testing. With the support of the Bloom Foster Care team, she was able to complete her remedial classwork and graduate from Tucker High School this past spring—all while learning how to be a mother for her 2-year-old daughter.

Currently, Adrianna is a student within the University System of Georgia. Through Bloom's connections in the community, the organization was able to provide her with a $2,500 college scholarship from a local children's publishing company to support the purchase of books and necessities for college. Adrianna is currently thriving in an Independent Living Program, and she and her daughter are living in their very own apartment.

Adrianna's story is just one example of the life-changing impact made by Bloom's programs. As we continue to navigate during this time of national crisis, Bloom is committed to meeting the needs of the foster children in our program through individualized service plans and educational support.

### Making the Grade

Did you know that Bloom supports foster children's academic success? By redistributing donated merchandise and funds through The Bloom Closet, foster children are given the tools necessary to thrive in school and through virtual learning. Because of our generous donors, Bloom is able to provide foster children with a variety of academic support—everything from laptops and tablets to tutoring and college scholarships.



"IT MEANS SO MUCH TO ME THAT I HAVE PEOPLE WHO REALLY WANT TO HELP AND SUPPORT ME."

*- Adrianna, former Bloom Foster Child*

# FOREVER

## OUR MOMMY YOU'LL BE

Needless to say, the global pandemic has created a greater appreciation for quality time spent with friends and family. The cruel sting of separation has been felt by everyone during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, for three former Bloom foster children, the past year has been a time of incredible closeness. Having been separated until their adoption in 2019, sisters Millie, Hannah, and Karleigh have spent their quarantine time bonding with one another and their new mother Amanda.

The journey to adoption began when Bloom foster parent, Amanda, accepted a newborn foster placement back in 2017. Karleigh was only 4-weeks old when she and Amanda first met (Pictured on next page, top left). As her very first foster child, Amanda was over the moon. After just a year of foster care, Amanda found out that Karleigh's biological mother was expecting another child. When asked if she would also take Karleigh's sister into her foster home, Amanda eagerly agreed. "I wanted them to be together," Amanda says. "It was challenging taking care of two infants under 2 years old, but I had a wonderful support system including Bloom's foster care team, my wonderful family, and friends."

In 2015, Amanda got another call. Karleigh and Hannah had a 7-year-old sister that also needed a foster home. Unlike her two siblings, who were placed into foster care as infants, this little girl had experienced more heartbreak and loss in her young life than many of us could ever imagine. Millie had been tossed from foster home to the next. She witnessed the tragic death of her 3-year-old sister. She had never met her other two sisters. At one point, she went to live with her great-grandmother. Millie's hopes for a family were shattered when her great-grandmother told her "I can't keep you." She thought of herself as unlovable.

In 2017, Millie was accepted into Bloom's program and moved in with Amanda, Karleigh, and Hannah. "When I first met Millie, she told me 'I don't have a family. It's just me,'" Amanda comments. "It was heartbreaking." It took months for Millie to trust that this would be her last foster home. In 2019, Amanda adopted all three sisters. "It was absolutely the right choice to adopt all three girls," Amanda says. "It was God's plan from Day 1."

Amanda always felt that it was her calling to bring the girls together as a family. When she met Millie, her feelings became clearer. "My sister always said that Millie was my first baby, but I just didn't get her first," Amanda comments. "I know in my heart that my foster care journey happened so Millie could be here with us."

For Millie, it wasn't until after Adoption Day that she began to realize she wouldn't be alone anymore. Not only did she have Amanda now, but she was a big sister. Somehow, her dreams came true and she had found a forever family. And her forever mommy. In fact, she actually came up with the saying, "Forever our mommy you'll be," which was posted on a sign at their Adoption Day celebration. Her only wish was to have a family. To have a mommy. And, because of Bloom and Amanda, three entire lives have changed.

Since their adoption, the Harrill girls have blossomed. Karleigh is now a feisty, independent 5-year-old who loves gymnastics and writing stories. She is her older sister's biggest cheerleader. "She thinks that Millie hung the moon," Amanda laughs. "She will follow Millie around and try to do everything her big sister does." Younger sister Hannah, now four years old, has a very vibrant personality and loves to talk. She stays home with Amanda while the other girls are at school. "Hannah is my little sidekick," Amanda says. "She's really come out of her shell the last two years." Millie has learned to trust that everyone in her life is there to stay. Although it's only been 2 years since the adoption, Millie feels so at home with her new family that she often refers to their life together as "how it's always been." Amanda comments, "Although this might not have 'always been' her life, I can promise her that it 'always will be.'"

## Did You Know?

At Bloom, the strong support system we have built into our Foster Care program is unparalleled in the state. When a Bloom foster parent accepts the responsibility of caring for a child, we accept the role of supporting them. Our team is committed to providing a family-centered environment where each foster child can heal, grow, and thrive.

**92%** *of siblings referred to Bloom were able to be placed together in a Bloom Foster Home.*

**85%** *of school aged children showed academic improvement within 6 months of living in a Bloom foster home.*

**80%** *of Bloom's foster children showed significant improvement in the areas of physical and behavioral health within 6 months of entering the program.*

# Thank You to Our Donors

*Donor list is only reflective of cash donations of $250 or higher made between December 1, 2019 and December 31, 2020. It does not include in-kind gifts.*

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Southside Church, Be Rich Campaign
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## Ways to Get Involved

Do you have a heart for children? If so, we invite you to get involved with Bloom! Your support will help us actively move forward in our mission to strengthen children in foster care and empower the families who care for them. We invite you to join us to continue making a difference in the lives of thousands of foster children each year!

### "Bee Kind" Campaign

Start the year off on a positive note by supporting Bloom's "Kindness" campaign! Make a donation and get an adorable "Bee Kind" t-shirt! Find out more at bloomouryouth.org

### Volunteer with Us

Volunteers are the heartbeat of our organization! We are seeking more people who are willing to donate their time and talents to help foster youth thrive. Sign up at bloomouryouth.org.

### Donate Monthly and Make an Impact

Monthly financial pledges ensure that foster children will find comfort and love through Bloom's programs all year long. Donations are tax-deductible. To contribute, visit bloomouryouth.org.

### Grant a Foster Child's Wish

Each year, Bloom collects more than 500 Christmas presents to grant holiday wishes for the foster youth in our care. It's the perfect opportunity for you, your family, or group to give back during the holidays. To participate in 2021, call 770-460-6652.

## Stay Connected

It's easy to stay up to date with Bloom's news, events, and ways to help!

### Get Updates

Don't miss a thing! Join Bloom's email list and get the latest news and upcoming events delivered directly to your inbox! Visit bloomouryouth.org to sign up.

### Stay Social

Connect with us on Facebook and follow us on Instagram and Twitter! Watch live updates from The Bloom Closet and be the first to know about special announcements!

### Watch Videos

Click over to Bloom's YouTube channel to watch heartwarming Foster Parent interviews, tours of The Bloom Closet, and other exciting features!

bloom

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THE MISSION OF BLOOM IS TO STRENGTHEN CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE AND EMPOWER THE FAMILIES WHO CARE FOR THEM.

bloomouryouth.org
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