

# June and Don Ashwell

*Retired Foster Parents*



Forty-seven years as a foster parent. More than 140 foster children. What more do you need to know about June Ashwell?

June came to Canada as a young woman – a nanny who was blessed with a special ability to connect with children, particularly infants. As a volunteer in the hospital, June met a nurse who was involved with Children’s Aid, and soon after she and her husband took in twin boys, the first of many children to be welcomed into their home.

Today, though retired, “Grandma June” is still involved with three ex-foster kids, now adults, including one who lives

with her. She tells stories of others, once in her care, who have stayed connected with her family over many years – Sunday dinners together, holiday gatherings, meeting their new husbands or wives, and cuddling their newborns. One young woman searched for June for 10 years, finally finding her. When she called, she didn’t think June would remember her.

But of course, June did.

“As a foster parent, you have to be in it for the long haul, or you will miss out on moments like that,” she says. “There are few rewards while you’re in it. You can’t imagine you’re having an impact. Sometimes it takes years to see that you did.”

## **This is going to be my life**

June always saw her role as a professional, dedicated to her job. She believes that was the secret to her success and hopes others will follow her lead.

“We need people who are going to say, ‘this is going to be my life.’ For the kids who need us long-term, we need people who hang in there, getting support from the Society as they go along. And I tell parents, no matter what, give 90 per cent to the child, but always keep 10 per cent for yourself.”

June’s experiences have allowed her to advocate for the children and teenagers in her care. Her most memorable times were spent standing up for what she felt was right for her kids, whether it was fighting to keep siblings together or deciding on the right adoptive family for a challenging infant.

“Foster parents shouldn’t be afraid to stand up for what they believe,” she says. “You live with that child. You can be their voice. When the Society listened, I felt a lot of respect and a lot of hope.”

## **Workers are there to help**

If you meet June, she might remind you of your own grandmother – loving, wise and zero tolerance for any sort of rubbish. Her straight talk about the Halton CAS will quickly convince you that there is far more good work going on than most people realize.

“I want people to know that CAS workers are there to help,” she says.

“Foster parents can play a more dominant role in helping kids and parents accept CAS as friends, as opposed to enemies. This is their helpline, a way to make things better.”

# CHOICE

*“The Halton CAS gives everybody – kids and parents – a choice. They show families that there is a different way to live. People can decide whether or not to act on those choices, but if CAS doesn’t step in, they may never have that opportunity to change.”*