

# Foster Parents' Bond: Proud & Personal

Alicia Dudley and Maria Gordils do not know each other but they both possess a special something that bonds them together. They are foster parents, and their love and commitment of caring for foster children spans two decades for Maria and nearly that long for Alicia.

Maria recalls that it was her observation some 20 years ago of two women in her apartment building taking care of children. She thought perhaps they were the women's grandchildren but in a conversation with them she learned that the women were both foster parents and the children were in their care. That conversation led her to Saint Dominic's Home, which soon evolved into Maria herself becoming a foster parent.

Maria really wanted to make a difference in a child's life and this was her opportunity. Her first foster child whom she adopted as a baby is now a beautiful 17 year-old that Maria calls "my princess." Since then she has been a foster parent to 30 children, including several children over the ages of 12 in Saint Dominic's Home Therapeutic Foster Care Program. Maria says she has always had a positive experience as a foster mother over 20 years and credits the great support from the social workers at Saint Dominic's Home for making it so rewarding.

"Being a foster parent has completed me as a person. I know in my heart that the reward is mutually beneficial to both my children and to me. The children know that when they come to my house they are home. They also know that they are my children. When they eventually go back to their families they are usually better behaved than when they came to live with me, and that makes me happy," says Maria.

Although Maria speaks Spanish and little English she never lets the language barrier get in the way of her care for her children and the bond they develop. She adds that her children have taught her some English and she has taught them some Spanish. Maria boasts that even years after leaving her home, her foster kids still come back for visits and they affectionately call her "mami." On Mother's Day, she receives cards and even has an occasional song sung to her.

When asked if she has any plans to retire from foster care, Maria smiles and says "I will continue being a foster parent as long as God allows me to do it."

When you meet Alicia Dudley you know you have met an impressive woman. And, after learning what she has accomplished over the past 17 years you can't help but hold her to the highest esteem.



Alicia Dudley with three of her foster children.

Alicia has committed most of her life to helping children. For nearly two decades she has been a foster parent, the last 10 working with Saint Dominic's Home. Alicia has cared for 50 children over this period, from infants to 12 years old. She currently has seven children in her home, five that she has adopted and two that she is fostering.

The yearning and commitment to help children grow and see them become successful is the motivation behind Alicia's passion for foster care. Her youngest just turned one and she says she is especially fond of caring for very young children.

"It takes a lot of hard work, dedication and commitment to the children to be a successful foster parent, but the reward of seeing their growth and success is immeasurable. This is what drives me every day and keeps a smile on my face," says Alicia.

Alicia says she is very attached to all of the children and makes it a point to see that they are fully involved in activities, especially the older children which she has in dance classes and marching band.

Foster parenting is a full-time commitment and she encourages others who have the time, patience and love to consider giving of themselves to help the many children who are in need. Alicia says that working with an agency such as Saint Dominic's Home makes it easier and provides the support necessary to be successful.