

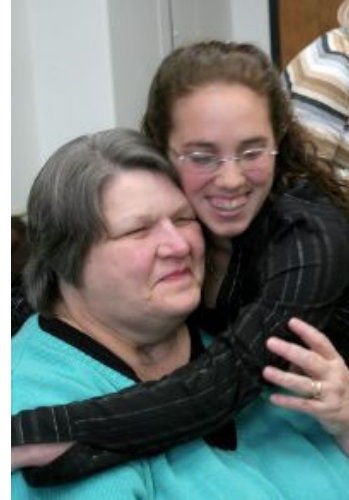
Ray of sunshine at City Hall

By: Andrew Perlot , Staff

MERIDEN -- Probate Judge Philip A. Wright Jr. said he was only making legal what had been a reality for some time, and with a slam of his gavel Felicia Annie Bruno became Felicia Annie Bruno-Vitale, the daughter of Stanley and Linda Vitale.

Bruno-Vitale, 15, has been a foster child of the Vitale's for about five years. Friday's event at City Hall, part of National Adoption Month, made their bond official.

Wright said the majority of the child-custody cases a probate judge deals with are sad, but that "adoptions like this are a ray of sunshine."



Johnathon Henninger / Record Journal

The wait for the adoption to go through was a long one, and Bruno-Vitale said she was relieved.

"I was, like, 'Oh, my, god, I'm adopted - finally!'" she said.

Bruno-Vitale lives with her parents in Wallingford, where she is a sophomore at Sheehan High School.

Her mother, Linda Vitale, has made a life out of taking care of children.

She has five biological children, adopted a daughter and two sons, and taken in other foster children.

"It's in my blood," she said. "For 32 years I've been taking in children. The children needed a home, and we're here."

She said they had not anticipated adopting Bruno-Vitale, but after spending years with her she has become a member of the family.

Linda Vitale operates the buddy hotline for the Connecticut Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents, which helps new foster parents.

Lisa Flower, a caseworker with the Department of Children and Families, said the adoption of a 15-year-old is unusual.

"This is really special," she said.

Most families want to adopt babies, although there are plenty of older children in need of a home.

National Adoption Month is a way to encourage families to consider adoption, Flower said.

Stanley Vitale had a tear in his eye as he spoke of his new daughter.

He was a driver for the state Department of Children and Families before retiring and met his daughter by driving her to appointments. "She just fit right in," he said. "I'm really happy."

Anyone interested in adopting a child may call 1-888-KIDHERO