

Exclusive

## Single Woman Became a Foster Parent at 39. After Fostering 10 Kids and Adopting 4, She's Hoping to Pay it Forward (Exclusive)

Darcy Olsen's work with her foundation, the Center for the Rights of Abused Children, has helped more than one million abused and neglected children

By [Hannah Sacks](#) | Published on May 28, 2026 06:00AM EDT

1 COMMENT

### NEED TO KNOW

- Darcy Olsen became a foster mom at nearly 40 after seeing a story about single moms fostering siblings
- She has fostered 10 children, adopted 4, and founded a nonprofit to protect abused children's rights in Arizona
- Olsen says foster kids need homes, not fixing, and challenges myths about children in the foster care system



Darcy Olsen and her family. Credit: Courtesy Center for the Rights of Abused Children

When Darcy Olsen was almost 40, she became a foster mom. And that one decision helped to shape the rest of her life.

Olsen always thought she'd become a mom in the typical way. She expected an engagement, a wedding and eventually, a baby — and she believed this so deeply that she bought an SUV to fill with her future kids. But as time passed, Olsen grew less and less sure it would happen.

"I was almost 40, single, and running a growing organization," she tells PEOPLE. "One night I was watching *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* and a caption flashed across the screen: 'single mom fosters brothers and sisters.'"

"My heart leapt. I thought, 'I can do this, I can be a "temp mom!" ' I signed up the next morning," remembers Olsen.

She recalls being "terrified" during her first experience fostering a baby. On her very first day as a licensed foster mom, Olsen was called to pick up a newborn at the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

"She'd spent her first two weeks of life on a morphine drip," says Olsen. "I walked into the hospital, saw a small chapel and fell to my knees. I prayed three prayers: one for the baby, one for her mother and one for me — that I'd be enough...because I was who there was."

When she finally held the baby for the first time, Olsen remembers letting go of what a "family was supposed to look like." There was no handbook about how to be a foster mom — instead, Olsen just brought the little one home.

"The wild ride never stopped. And neither did the love I didn't see coming," she says. "Soon, a social worker called and asked if I could take another baby. Shelters and group homes were overflowing. I should have thought long and hard. I was single, exhausted, running on coffee. But I thought, 'If I have room for one, I have room for two.'"

"And at two, I thought, 'If I have room for two, I have room for three.' That's how you end up at 10. My SUV is full now, and it smells like McDonald's French fries and sweaty sneakers."

Olsen, now 54, says she never set out to adopt. The mom, who lives in Phoenix, only wanted to foster and help out for a "little while."

"But six months in, the social worker told me my baby girl had nowhere else to go and asked if I'd adopt her," she says. "I'd like to say I thought it through. I was exhausted — CEO by day, mom by night...pediatrician visits, social worker visits, the midnight feed, the 3 a.m. feed, then up to do it all again."

"But the truth is, I didn't think twice. I was the only mother she knew. I did what any mother would do," explains Olsen. "I kept her. She was the best decision I never made."

Since then, Olsen's family has grown more and more. She remembers asking social workers early on if putting kids in a two-parent household would be better.

"When a social worker asked if I'd adopt another baby I'd been fostering, I asked the same question. 'Do you have a two-parent family who can do this better?' " says Olsen. "She said, 'We have a few. But we know the future he'll have with your family. We want him here.'"

"I burst into tears. She saw what I hadn't yet seen — that we were already, exactly as we were, a great family," she continues. "As a single mom, that was the moment everything changed. I stopped waiting for the family I thought I was supposed to have and started building the one that was already mine."

When she founded her Arizona-based nonprofit, The Center for the Rights of Abused Children, Olsen says she saw what most people couldn't see. Children were sleeping in shelters and group homes, waiting years to find a family. Kids were alone in court, and some didn't survive.

"I expected the hard part to be nursing these babies back to health — the withdrawals, the sleepless nights, the tremors. I didn't expect more danger in the American courtroom," she explains.

"Our laws are outdated. Children are not protected. Criminals get lawyers, but most abused children never do," says Olsen. "I founded the Center for the Rights of Abused Children to establish the protections these children have been denied."

"Our work has helped more than one million children. Every child deserves a safe and loving home."

At the end of the day, Olsen says she wants others to understand that kids in foster care didn't do anything wrong — they're just part of a system that's failed them.

"The biggest myth is that kids in foster care have done something wrong — that they're delinquents or troubled teens," she says. "The truth is the exact opposite. Foster care is where children go when adults have failed them. When they've been abused, abandoned, or neglected — through no fault of their own."

"These aren't kids who need fixing. They're children who need a home."



Darcy Olsen's family. Credit: Courtesy Center for the Rights of Abused Children



Darcy Olsen and her family. Credit: Courtesy Center for the Rights of Abused Children



Darcy Olsen. Credit: Courtesy Center for the Rights of Abused Children



Darcy Olsen. Credit: Courtesy Center for the Rights of Abused Children