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OPEN NINTH:
CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM
CHANGING ONE LIFE AT A TIME
EPISODE 35
NOVEMBER 17, 2017
HOSTED BY: FREDERICK J. LAUTEN

1 (Music.)

2 >> Welcome to another episode of "Open Ninth:
3 Conversations Beyond the Courtroom" in the Ninth Judicial
4 Circuit Court of Florida.

5 Now here's your host, Chief Judge Fred Lauten.

6 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I am here today with Paul Mannix
7 and Elena Sciuto, who recently adopted a baby during our
8 National Adoption Day ceremonies. And they are passionate
9 about helping children, and they have made an incredible
10 difference in the lives of many foster children. So Elena
11 and Paul, welcome to "Open Ninth." It's great to have you.

12 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Thank you.

13 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Thank you.

14 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So let's talk a little bit
15 about -- this is National Adoption Month -- about adoption,
16 about foster parenting, about families.

17 So I understand you grew up in a pretty big family,
18 Elena.

19 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes.

20 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Why don't you tell us a little
21 bit about that.

22 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Um, I grew up in Italy, in a town
23 called Riposto. And my family consisted of five boys and
24 five girls. So my parents had ten kids.

25 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Ten children.

1 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Yes.

2 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: That's amazing.

3 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Yes.

4 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Holy smokes.

5 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Yes, it was interesting and beautiful
6 growing up in a large family. So I've always been used to
7 having kids around me.

8 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Right.

9 >> ELENA SCIUTO: This is nothing new to me.

10 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Right. Your parents survived
11 ten children? That's amazing.

12 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Yes. They did a great job.

13 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Unbelievable.

14 So, Paul, tell us a little bit about the family you grew
15 up in.

16 >> PAUL MANNIX: Um, I grew up in a pretty normal
17 family. I grew up in Montana, actually, with my parents.
18 And I just have one sister. So it was just the two of us.
19 But we always did things together as a family and always had
20 lots of extended family around, so ...

21 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: And how did you two meet?
22 What's the story behind that?

23 >> PAUL MANNIX: Actually, Elena was the director of the
24 before or after school program at the grade school that my
25 kids went to. So I met her through my kids, actually.

1 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Yes.

2 >> PAUL MANNIX: They were in her program.

3 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: And -- so how long have you
4 been -- you two been a couple and married?

5 >> ELENA SCIUTO: We've known each other over six years.

6 >> PAUL MANNIX: And we've been married for a little
7 over four.

8 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Fabulous.

9 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Yes.

10 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Fabulous.

11 So right away in your marriage did you decide that you
12 would start helping foster children in our child system, or
13 when did that happen?

14 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Well, I was a foster parent previously
15 in the year 2005-2010, so I did foster 24 beautiful children.

16 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Before you met Paul?

17 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Before I met Paul, yes.

18 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Wow.

19 >> ELENA SCIUTO: And so at that time, you know, I
20 decided to take a break to raise my kids. I have three
21 children. And then when I met Paul, I really, you know,
22 wanted to get back into fostering. And, Paul, of course was
23 interested. So we started the process again.

24 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: So do you have children of your
25 own when you met Elena?

1 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Yes. I've got two kids. So between
2 us, we have five of our own.

3 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So you have a blended family.

4 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes.

5 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Five children. That's a handful
6 in today's society. And yet you've started the conversation
7 about maybe we should also help foster children?

8 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes. Well, I have a son that's
9 already 24 years old.

10 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay.

11 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** And then a daughter, she's 15. And
12 the other one, she's ten. So we felt our children were old
13 enough -- his children are --

14 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Yeah. Mine are 18 and 14.

15 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes.

16 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** So they're starting to get into their
17 teens and high school years and stuff, so we felt it was time
18 to start helping some babies as well.

19 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Great. But let's talk a little
20 bit about -- so you have a blended family. You have
21 teenagers. Some -- and adult children.

22 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes.

23 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Do you bring the teenagers into
24 the conversation from the get go about should we foster other
25 children or not?

1 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Yes.

2 >> PAUL MANNIX: Yes, we did.

3 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Great.

4 >> ELENA SCIUTO: We talked to all the children, even
5 the 24-year-old. We talked to him about the idea and whether
6 everybody would be supportive and be a part of it. And
7 everybody thought it was a great idea.

8 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: That's beautiful. That's
9 fabulous.

10 So tell me about the first foster child that you
11 welcomed into your home.

12 >> ELENA SCIUTO: It was a little girl. Three months
13 old.

14 >> PAUL MANNIX: Yep. Her name was Jolese. Beautiful
15 little girl.

16 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Yes. She was amazing. She was a
17 beautiful little girl. We -- of course, you know, we tried
18 to do as much as we could, you know, helping, you know,
19 the -- for her to go back to the family, you know, being
20 involved with the biological family also.

21 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Right.

22 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Because that's the ultimate goal. But
23 she did go back with the grandma. So we went --

24 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Wonderful. How long was she in
25 your home?

1 >> ELENA SCIUTO: She was about three months with us.

2 >> PAUL MANNIX: Yes.

3 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Okay.

4 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Yes.

5 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Great. And so that was the
6 first child that you --

7 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Yes.

8 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: -- foster parents for. How many
9 more were there?

10 >> PAUL MANNIX: There's been a total of 13 in the last
11 two and a half years.

12 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: That's amazing. That's
13 fabulous.

14 >> ELENA SCIUTO: We have three at the moment.

15 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Thank you so much.

16 >> PAUL MANNIX: Yeah, we currently have three.

17 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: You have three foster
18 children --

19 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Yes.

20 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: -- in your home. What's the
21 longest period of time where you've had a foster child in
22 your home?

23 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Lately, it's been pretty fast.

24 Meaning, like, one week to six months --

25 >> PAUL MANNIX: Yeah.

1 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Well, 14 months for our little boy.

2 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Yeah. Marco, the one we're gonna
3 adopt, has been with us for 14 months.

4 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes.

5 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** And that has been by far the longest.
6 Most have been six months or less.

7 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Even in six months, though, I
8 have to -- I have to imagine that you foster a bond with
9 these children, and I'm sure our listeners are wondering how
10 difficult is it to have a child in your home, welcome them as
11 you both have done, foster them, and then have them leave
12 your home? I mean, it's -- it's got to be bittersweet. It's
13 probably fabulous that they're reunited with their biological
14 family, but how difficult is that emotionally for both of
15 you?

16 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Well, um, from the beginning, when a
17 child comes to us, the goal is reunification with the family.
18 We are parents. We want our children to be with us. So the
19 same should be for all the other parents.

20 So that's always in our mind. Of course, we also
21 believe that everything happens for a reason.

22 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

23 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** So, you know, a child will go where he
24 is meant to be. But while they're with us, they're our
25 children.

1 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Great.

2 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** They're treated just like ours. When
3 they leave, it breaks our heart. We're very upset. We're
4 very sad, you know? We lose a child, but then we get the
5 next call, and then it's all starting over.

6 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So really the cycle starts over
7 again?

8 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes.

9 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** What are the biggest challenges
10 to being foster parents from your perspective?

11 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** I would say, kind of, to stay neutral
12 when you see what these children have been through, and you
13 really have to keep an open mind and kind of not be
14 judgemental [sic] of the parents. That's the hardest part for
15 me.

16 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Yeah. Everybody goes through a
17 difficult time, and if -- for this specific situation, the
18 parents need to let the child go to somebody else to take
19 care of them for a bit so they can get back on their feet or
20 whatever it is to solve whatever problem they're having, then
21 that's what we're here for.

22 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Have you ever encountered a
23 situation where the biological parents resented your being
24 foster parents, having their children in your custody for any
25 period of time?

1 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes. I went to a visit, and I met the
2 biological mom of two little girls that we had. And I said
3 hi, how are you? I'm the foster mom. And she didn't really
4 talk to me.

5 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** She wasn't happy. I see.

6 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** She walked away --

7 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. Gotcha.

8 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** -- from me. But I understand.

9 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** There are so many emotions
10 involved.

11 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Of course.

12 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** And for the most part, the biological
13 parents that we've met have been very positive with us.

14 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So it's an exception to
15 encounter that?

16 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Yes.

17 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes.

18 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Most of the time, your -- the
19 biological parents appreciate your role and what you're
20 doing?

21 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Yes. And that's what we have found.

22 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Yeah. That's great.

23 I think this might be self-evident, but what are the
24 greatest rewards of being foster parents?

25 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** For me, the bond that we, you know,

1 develop with the kids, the smiles on their faces. They come
2 kind of -- I would say a little bit broken when they come to
3 our house. And then to see them change, you know, their
4 demeanor and the attitude, they become positive and, you
5 know, happier children. So that's the rewards.

6 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Great. That's beautiful.

7 Paul, same thing? Different?

8 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Yeah, for the most part, same thing.

9 One of the children that we have had came to us very scared
10 of, um, the male figure of the house. He immediately went to
11 my wife but was very scared of me for the first couple of
12 days. And it took a little bit of time for him to accept me,
13 and now he runs to me and he gives me hugs and all that kind
14 of stuff. And so, you know, this child has been through a
15 very difficult, traumatic experience with a man. And so that
16 has been a problem for him. And for me to be able to help
17 him get over that is a wonderful thing.

18 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. That's great.

19 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes.

20 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** How -- how do -- do the children
21 for whom you have acted as foster parents, do you stay in
22 touch with them, or is it better to have a kind of break so
23 that they completely reunify with their biological family?
24 What happens with former foster children from your
25 experience?

1 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Well --

2 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** The ones that we have right now, for
3 the most part, we have had a pretty clean break. Now, we
4 have the feeling -- and we would like to change the system a
5 little bit in the fact that we would love to know what
6 happens with those children after they leave our home. You
7 know, was the reunification successful? Did everything go
8 well for them going forward? We certainly don't want to get
9 in the middle of, um, causing any sort of issues with the
10 biological parents, but we would love to know what happens
11 with them as they go forward.

12 But, um, we have one foster child right now that we
13 really don't interact with the child, but my wife interacts
14 with the mother of the child -- actually, an adoptive mother
15 of that child -- so we get to see some pictures --

16 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes.

17 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** -- and things like that.

18 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

19 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** So we're not really involved on a
20 day-to-day basis, but it's great to see that he's doing well
21 and growing and all that sort of thing. But there's one
22 foster child that Elena has from when --

23 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** I had --

24 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** -- she did it before.

25 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** -- him for three years. Yes.

1 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** That she has kept in touch with him.
2 He's 18 now, I think?

3 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes.

4 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** And he was a foster child of hers when
5 he was very small and went in and out of her home a couple of
6 times. So he really bonded with Elena and has, through the
7 years, always tried to keep in contact with her, and we have
8 maintained that contact.

9 He has now, thankfully, been adopted a couple years ago,
10 and we actually went to the adoption to watch this family.

11 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Wow.

12 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** -- get together, which was wonderful.

13 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes. And he came to our house. Yes.

14 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Why don't you share with our
15 listeners, what does it take to become a foster parent? It's
16 one day, all of a sudden, you're approved to be a foster
17 parent? Tell us a little bit about what it takes for someone
18 to become a foster parent.

19 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Well, in my opinion, it takes you to
20 open your heart --

21 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

22 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** -- to somebody else. You know, your
23 home and your heart, you know, and you have to -- um, how do
24 you say it?

25 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** You have to be prepared for the

1 situation.

2 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Yes.

3 >> PAUL MANNIX: Like you said, it's very difficult for
4 us when these kids leave, and, you know, it takes a certain
5 type of person to be able to let go and know that that's the
6 best thing for the child. You know, because there's children
7 where we've wanted to keep that it's probably not the best
8 thing. The best thing is for them to be back with their
9 family, and so that's a very difficult thing to go through.
10 And so you need to be prepared for that.

11 On the technical side --

12 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: So, yeah, that's the sort of --

13 >> PAUL MANNIX: -- there are classes --

14 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: -- social and psychological
15 preparation.

16 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Yes.

17 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: How about the sort of legalistic
18 or procedural aspect of becoming a foster parent?

19 >> PAUL MANNIX: There are classes that you have to go
20 through.

21 >> ELENA SCIUTO: Yes.

22 >> PAUL MANNIX: There is a process that is a lot of
23 background checks and paperwork and things of that sort,
24 really just to ensure that the people who want to become
25 foster parents are the best people to then take the care of

1 these children.

2 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And about how long does that
3 process take? Is there a set period of time?

4 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** It -- there's not really a set
5 period --

6 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** How about years experience,
7 Elena? Did it take --

8 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** It took about a year.

9 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Our experience took about a year --

10 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Took about a year?

11 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** -- to get through the classes and all
12 the paperwork and everything.

13 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And is that DCF who mostly does
14 the -- Department of Children and Families who does the
15 background?

16 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** It's -- Department of Children and
17 Families is involved, but there is also local-area agencies.
18 We actually are foster parents for an agency called Devereux,
19 and they report to, um, Department of Children and Families.

20 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And just so our listeners know,
21 so the State has a system in place to check the homes of --
22 of those families who are willing, thankfully, to serve as
23 foster parents to make sure it's a safe environment?

24 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Yes.

25 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes.

1 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** That parents are wanting to be
2 foster parents for the right reason, and that you just don't
3 raise your hand one day and say, I'll take a foster child,
4 and then it happens?

5 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** That's correct.

6 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Although, we need more foster
7 families in Florida, still, you can understand where the
8 State would say it's imperative that we do this background
9 check.

10 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Yeah.

11 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Well, you have had a unique and
12 beautiful experience with one of your fosters in that you're
13 in the process of, or have -- you have to help me here --
14 adopted one of the children that --

15 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Yes. We're in the process.

16 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So tell our listeners a little
17 bit about that. It's a fabulous story.

18 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Yep. We actually got a little boy when
19 he was about a week old straight from the hospital.

20 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Wow.

21 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** And we've raised him for the last 14
22 months. He's between 14 and 15 months now, and he's just a
23 wonderful, wonderful little boy.

24 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** What is his name?

25 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** His name is Marco.

1 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay. Marco. Beautiful.

2 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Thank you.

3 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Is going to be the given name as of
4 next week when we have -- adoption is official.

5 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay. Great.

6 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** He's been a wonderful little boy in our
7 family and fit in very well with our family. And it just did
8 not work out for him to go back to his biological family.
9 And so we wanted to welcome our home to keep him forever.
10 He's just a wonderful little boy.

11 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** When our kids come from school, the
12 first thing, where's Marco?

13 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Fabulous.

14 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** And if he's at the daycare, they get
15 disappointed. They are all in love with him.

16 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So will the adoption be
17 finalized at our program, at the adoption ceremony here?

18 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Yes.

19 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes.

20 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** -- in the --

21 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** National Adoption Day, which is next
22 Friday.

23 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So great time to tell our
24 listeners that next Friday in the jury room, that room is
25 transformed into a room you can't recognize from my

1 perspective. I'm in it almost every day. And each year, we
2 do an adoption event in our jury room, and, um, the room is
3 transformed into different themes. And you walk into the
4 room and just can't believe what you're seeing. But it's
5 also probably the most joyous and beautiful event that
6 happens in the -- in the courthouse.

7 I think the events that are fabulous here are -- tops on
8 the list clearly are adoptions, marriages, and then swearing
9 in lawyers who have become members of the bar.

10 But the clear winner, the No. 1 winner is adoption --
11 doing adoptions, and then we have this large ceremony next
12 Friday where we'll do it. So that's fabulous. And you-all
13 will be there, which is wonderful.

14 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Yep.

15 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes.

16 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Absolutely.

17 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And I'm gonna be there. And,
18 um -- so any -- were there any hurdles that you had to jump
19 for -- to adopt Marco? Was it fairly smooth or --

20 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** It --

21 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** It was fairly smooth. It's just a
22 process, again. Everything we go through to become a foster
23 parent, you pretty much go through a similar process to make
24 sure that we're the right family for him for the future. And
25 so we did a lot more paperwork and things of that sort,

1 background checks and stuff.

2 But -- you know, we went through with flying colors, and
3 Marco's gonna be a permanent member of our family as of next
4 Friday, so we're real excited. Yes, we're very happy.

5 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So that's great.
6 Congratulations.

7 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Thank you.

8 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So how many children are in your
9 home right now? That is, you have a blended family, so you
10 have your own children. Marco, who's just on the verge of
11 being a permanent member of your forever family. How many
12 other children in your home right now?

13 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** So right now we have six children in
14 the home.

15 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So what are the mornings like in
16 your household?

17 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Interesting. Interesting.

18 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** They range from age -- I guess
19 Marco's probably the youngest?

20 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** No. We have a five-months-old little
21 girl.

22 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** That you-all have had?

23 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes.

24 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Foster child.

25 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** A five-month-old. I'm sorry.

1 So you have a five-month-old?

2 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes. She came to us from the
3 hospital. So we've had her for five months. And then we
4 have her little brother, which she's 18 months old.

5 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Wow.

6 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Marco, of course, 14 months. And then
7 we've Jasmine, ten years old, and Joshua, 14. And Ashley, 15
8 years old.

9 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Wow.

10 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** So --

11 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So you have to get a little
12 regimented just to get everything done and get everybody
13 ready for the day and those school-aged children out the door
14 and into school?

15 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Absolutely.

16 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** We're very organized. Let's put it
17 this way.

18 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** You must be organized.

19 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes. You need organization and a lot
20 of patience.

21 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** That's -- that's fabulous.

22 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Yes.

23 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** What, if any, suggestions do you
24 have to make the foster system improved? What would you like
25 to -- is there anything you would like to see change where

1 you think if these changes were adopted, it would be a little
2 easier?

3 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** I would say the system has gotten a
4 lot better since I used to be a foster parent because
5 children used to stay in foster care three years. I had a
6 child even for six years. So it used to be a pretty long
7 time. I would say that it's getting better. So maybe a
8 shorter time in foster care. Either decide if they're going
9 to be going back with the biological family or adopted,
10 instead of keeping them in the foster care system.

11 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I've also heard about some
12 pressures for children who age out of the foster care system.
13 And, yet, then they're sort of on their own before they're
14 really ready to be on their own.

15 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes.

16 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I don't know if you've had that
17 experience. It sounds like a very difficult experience
18 for --

19 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Our understanding is that they've tried
20 to make some changes related to that. That in the past, as
21 soon as they hit 18, they were out of the system, and that
22 was it.

23 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Mm-hmm.

24 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** But my understanding is that they've
25 made some changes to help kids up until they're about 21 to

1 help them get a little bit more mature and a little bit
2 further along in their lives. So I do think they've made
3 some positive changes there.

4 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** That's great.

5 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** Yes.

6 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Um, how long have you talked
7 about this? How long will you-all serve as foster parents?
8 Does there come a point in time where you go -- because
9 you've done so much. And we commend you for what you've done
10 and you're very helpful to the system.

11 Does there come a time or an age where you think, maybe
12 we're done for a while? What do you think about that?

13 >> **ELENA SCIUTO:** I would say until everyone is on
14 board, our children -- because our children are the biggest
15 part of this. We want to make sure that if they're happy.
16 So right now, they're very excited. To them, it's beautiful
17 what we're doing. They really understand the impact that
18 we're making on these kids' lives. So I would say until
19 everyone is on board, it can go on forever. My goal would
20 be, like, fostering a hundred children.

21 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Oh, my gosh. That's fabulous.

22 (Laughter.)

23 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** You have the stamina for that,
24 Paul?

25 >> **PAUL MANNIX:** Absolutely.

1 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Great. Well, you-all are so
2 young and vivacious and so giving to open your home to folks.
3 So thank you so much.

4 Elena, thank you.

5 **>> ELENA SCIUTO:** Thank you.

6 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Paul, thank you. It's wonderful
7 talking to you. Thank you for what you've done for children
8 in need. And we owe you a debt I don't think we can ever
9 repay, but we're very grateful to you, and thanks for taking
10 time out for talking to us today.

11 **>> ELENA SCIUTO:** Thank you so much.

12 **>> PAUL MANNIX:** Thanks for the opportunity.

13 **>>** Thank you for listening to "Open Ninth." Stay up to
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17 access these, please click on the respective icons, which are
18 displayed at the bottom of our website at
19 www.ninthcircuit.org.

20 (Music.)

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