

# Mom AND Dad

Parenting has never been easy, and today's moms and dads face pressures their predecessors couldn't have predicted, from drugs to social media. To celebrate Mother's Day and Father's Day, we partnered with the Newport County YMCA and Child & Family Services to recognize moms and dads in our community who exemplify good parenting. We thank them for the introductions.

## Melissa Bowley

Melissa Bowley relocated to Newport seven years ago and was still getting to know the area when she became pregnant with her first child. She researched local support groups, doctors and other resources, but she missed having a close-knit group of family and friends at her fingertips to support and advise her.

While speaking to other moms, it dawned on her that she was not unique in her needs. "They all had different challenges — both emotional and physical — during their pregnancies and postpartum," says Bowley. "There was not enough focus on moms' well-being."

In a community with a continual influx of Navy families and other transplants, Newport lacked a central resource for expectant mothers. So Bowley decided to start one.

She created Momunity, a network of prenatal and postpartum care and support services. Momunity is a way to connect moms with the knowledge and support they need with a focus on evidence-based topics such as breastfeeding and mental health. Bowley works with providers to expand programs and share when

and where services are available. Using a combination of social media, wellness events and good old-fashioned legwork, Bowley has attracted over 200 website subscribers and more than 600 followers on social media.

The vice president of strategic development for a medical device company, Bowley lives in Newport with her husband, Chris, and their sons, Conrad, 4, and Hudson, 2. As Momunity has grown, the entire family helps out, with Chris designing the website and her sons working as greeters at events. "I would love for this to be my full-time job eventually," she says. "That's the goal."



## Dan Glenning

If you spend time at the YMCA, you may have visited Danny's Cafe. A small counter inside the lobby where you can get a muffin or a cup of coffee after your workout, it's run by 28-year-old Danny Glenning, who is somewhat of a celebrity here.

Danny has Down syndrome and is also nonverbal — a difficult combination of developmental challenges that requires limitless patience and dedication. It's a role his father, Dan Glenning, is uniquely suited for.

Glenning is relentless in keeping Danny engaged, both socially and physically, using the YMCA as a base for activity. Between unified bowling and basketball (team sports that include people with intellectual disabilities), swimming and other adaptive programs, Danny's participation is always part of the bigger goal of increasing his independence and interaction in the community. "Being a dad means staying involved," says Glenning. "I'm always leaning in. I hope it's always going to be like that."

He was looking for ways to keep his son engaged and active, and asked the YMCA to help him bring a Special Olympics program to Newport County. What started with just a few participants in 2008 now includes a dozen teams and more than 130 athletes. "It was always our goal ... to keep Danny in an integrated setting," says Glenning. Special Olympics provides that opportunity.

Glenning balances his time between his job at National Grid, supporting Danny in his daily routines and being a loving father and husband. He credits his wife, Jo, and his 22-year-old daughter, Jordan, as equal parts of the whole. They work together as a team to care for Danny and each other.

## Kristine Hendrickson

There is no ideal size, shape or color of a family, no perfect template for what makes a mom. But one element that must be present is unconditional love. That is what you see in Kristine Hendrickson. Hendrickson has fostered three infants, has adopted one, and is completing the process of adopting the second. The overwhelming love she displays for her children is evident the moment she starts to talk about them.

Hendrickson, who serves as the Associate Vice President of University Relations and Chief Communications Officer at Salve Regina University, knew before beginning the process of fostering that the experience would be the hardest, yet most rewarding, thing she had ever done. She knew that without a loving environment these children might start life at a significant disadvantage. It motivated her to make a difference and challenged her to be the best advocate for her charges.

Her son, now 7, understands part of what makes their family unique. He readily accepted the arrival of his new sister and was willing to share mom with a baby that needed someone to care for her. Hendrickson helps her son take ownership of his story amid a complicated mix of school, peers and family. "He is destined to be a cool kid. I am helping him discover that," she says. By contrast, his sister is feisty. "She's fiercely independent," says Hendrickson. It's as if she was born to stand up for herself.

Hendrickson has yet to find the perfect life partner. "Just because things didn't happen in the typical order doesn't mean they can't happen," she says. She works through the same daily struggles as other single working moms, managing child care, and juggling her busy social and professional schedule while relying on support from family and friends.

The satisfaction she gets seeing her children thrive is the only reward she wants. When asked to describe how she feels as a mother, her response is refreshingly honest. "Right now," she says, "I'm just tired."



## Mitchell Jackson

Frustrated with the lack of parental participation he found in Newport — especially among fathers — Mitchell Jackson formed a group called Strategically Teaching Rulers On New Grounds, or STRONG. Through mentorship and providing positive role models, the group aims to build a foundation for children that lifts them up and encourages them to become successful.

Originally from Louisiana, Jackson returned to Newport with his wife, Jennifer, a native of Newport County, after serving in the Navy as a corpsman and naval optician. Together they have two children, Felicity, 14, and Elijah, 9, and are also fostering siblings who are 10 and 8.

Jackson wanted to show young people that they are valued, and that they could become successful and respected if they were respectful to others. "I spoke with a young girl in the second grade. I asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up and she said she wanted to be a cashier at Walmart," Jackson says. He believes the children of this community should aspire to be entrepreneurs and leaders, instead. "It's hard to be successful if you've never seen success," says Jackson.

Jackson is heavily invested in the success of his community. In addition to his own organization, he is also a member of the board of directors for Newport Little League, is on the Thompson Middle School PTO, and is a member of the North End Neighborhood Association. He somehow finds time to accomplish all this while working at the Naval Health Clinic New England and wrapping up his bachelor's degree in business management. It's all part of his desire to pay it forward, making the community a better place. 🍎