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Country Artist Jimmy Wayne Receives National Foster Care Award



Chuck Johnson, President & CEO of the National Council For Adoption, presents Jimmy Wayne with the 2019 Warren and Mary Alice Babineaux Award in recognition of his continued commitment to creating positive change in the lives of children in foster care who need permanent families. The presentation followed Jimmy's 223rd Opry performance. (Photo courtesy Grand Ole Opry®, Chris Hollo photographer)

May 3, 2019 – Alexandria, VA – [National Council For Adoption](#) (NCFA) was proud to present the **2019 Warren and Mary Alice Babineaux Award** to recording artist [Jimmy Wayne](#) in recognition of his continued commitment to creating positive change in the lives of children in foster care who need permanent families.

The Babineaux Award was presented following Jimmy's 223rd Opry performance last night. This performance marks the continuation of a two-decade country career whose highlights include seven Top 40 hits, the Number One smash "Do You Believe Me Now," and sold-out shows at venues like Madison Square Garden.

Throughout his career, Jimmy Wayne has been a vocal advocate for children in foster care, openly speaking about his own experience as a homeless youth who was taken in by an elderly couple — Bea and Russell Costner, 75 and 79 years old respectively — when he was 16 years old. They invited him to live in their home which allowed him to go back to school and ultimately pursue and catch his dream of writing and performing music. Jimmy's three-time *New York Times* bestselling memoir [*Walk to Beautiful: The Power of Love and a Homeless Kid Who Found the Way*](#) has become a helpful resource for foster and respite parents seeking to better understand the children in their care. His children's book [*Ruby the Foster Dog*](#) — inspired by a puppy he rescued while on his walk halfway across America — explores the challenges of foster care in a way that is both heartwarming and relatable for all ages.

In 2010, Jimmy founded [Project Meet Me Halfway](#) — an initiative that inspires Americans to take action in their home communities as volunteers and advocates for children in foster care. The campaign coincided with Jimmy's walk halfway across America (1,700 miles from Nashville to Phoenix) to raise awareness of foster youth aging out of care into homelessness. Project Meet Me Halfway advocates for services for these at-risk youth and encourages states to increase the age of emancipation to 21 so that young people have continued access to critical services as they transition into adulthood. Jimmy helped advocate for the successful passage of legislation raising the emancipation age in California, Tennessee, and his home state of North Carolina.

"So many Americans know about foster care but aren't able to comprehend the struggles that these children face on a day-to-day basis. Using his own experiences, Jimmy is able to give voice to the 440,000 children living in care," says NCFA president and CEO Chuck Johnson. "Year after year, he has chosen to use his platform as a successful artist to magnify the voices of children who are so often voiceless. NCFA is grateful for his advocacy, and we're proud to present him with the Babineaux Award this year."

About Foster Care:

According to the [most recent report](#) from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, there are currently 442,995 children in U.S. foster care. Of these children, 123,437 are waiting to be adopted. The number of waiting children has reached a nine-year high, with a 13% increase in parental drug abuse cases playing a major role in this increase. Nearly 20,000 youth aged out of foster care this year and will navigate adulthood without the financial, educational, social, and psychological support they need to thrive. This is a national tragedy that must be addressed, as the outcomes for foster youth who age out of care are bleak. With no stable support system, these young adults are at high risk of homelessness, substance abuse, pregnancy, and incarceration.

About The Warren and Mary Alice Babineaux Award:

Established in 2015, the Warren and Mary Alice Babineaux Award honors individuals and organizations that have gone to extraordinary lengths to ensure children experience the love and stability that come with a forever family. This award is given to those who have demonstrated the most selfless commitment to providing resources, education, and leadership to address the many challenges including parent recruitment, training, and support services necessary to give children safe, stable, and loving adoptive families. The Warren and Mary Alice Babineaux Award acknowledges the dedicated efforts of those who have generously given their time, talents, and resources to ensure that all children can "come home" to a loving, forever family. The award is named for Adoption Hall of Fame recipients Warren and Mary Alice Babineaux who cared for more than 100 children in foster care during their decades-long tenure as foster and adoptive parents in Louisiana.

Awardees include:

- 2015: Governor John Kasich of Ohio and Governor John Hickenlooper of Colorado
- 2016: Former foster youth Sixto Cancel and Nicole Marchman

- 2017: NBC4 Washington's Barbara Harrison and Mississippi's Executive Director of the Division of Family and Children's Services Dr. David Chandler
- 2018: Lifelong adoption advocate Joe Kroll
- 2019: Country music artist Jimmy Wayne and author and co-founder of Comfort Cases Robert Scheer

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About National Council For Adoption:

Founded in 1980, National Council For Adoption (NCFA) is a global adoption advocacy nonprofit that promotes a culture of adoption through education, research, legislative action, and collaboration. As the authoritative voice for adoption, NCFA's areas of focus include domestic infant adoption, adoption and permanency outcomes for youth in foster care, and intercountry adoption. Passionately committed to the belief that every child deserves to thrive in a nurturing, permanent family, NCFA serves children, birth parents, adopted individuals, adoptive families, and adoption professionals. In addition, we work tirelessly to educate U.S. and foreign government officials and policymakers, members of the media, and all those in the general public with an interest in adoption.

For more information, visit www.AdoptionCouncil.org.

About *Walk to Beautiful* and Jimmy Wayne

Imagine yourself a 13-year-old hundreds of miles away from home, in a strange city, and your mom leaves you at a bus station parking lot and drives off into the night with her lover.

That's the real life story of country music star Jimmy Wayne. It's a miracle that Jimmy survived being hungry and homeless, bouncing in and out of the foster care system, and sleeping in the streets. But he didn't just overcome great adversity in his life; he now uses his country music platform to help children everywhere, especially teenagers in foster care who are about to age out of the system.

Walk to Beautiful is the powerfully emotive account of Jimmy's horrendous childhood and the love shown him by Russell and Bea Costner, the elderly couple who gave him a stable home and provided the chance to complete his education. Jimmy says of Bea, "She changed every cell in my body."

It also chronicles Jimmy's rise to fame in the music industry and his Meet Me Halfway campaign: his walk halfway across America, 1,700 miles from Nashville to Phoenix, to raise awareness for foster kids.

Today Jimmy continues his work as a child advocate by sharing his powerful music-infused presentation, "The Power of One," all around the world, while giving back to through his non-profit awareness campaign, Project Meet Me Halfway. For more about Jimmy Wayne, visit www.jimmywayne.com.

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