

The Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange is a program of Judson Center and is funded by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

To learn about foster care adoption and view photolistings and videos of waiting children, visit our website at www.mare.org.



Fostering positive change for youth in foster care

Adoptive mom shows it's in the bag!

Concerned about the plastic garbage bags that many youth in foster care use as suitcases, Jamie Rynearson decided to do something about it. The adoptive mother from Midland co-founded the Duffles Of Love Project, which replaces garbage bags with duffle bags filled with many basic supplies to comfort children in foster care.

"We immediately knew this project had the potential to change some lives," Rynearson says.

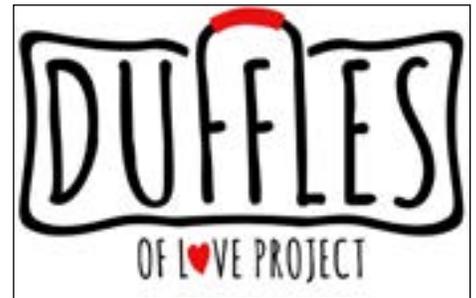
"When children receive a duffle

bag, they are excited and surprised," says Vyctoria Sanborn, adoption/foster care supervisor for Oakland Family Services.

The idea for the project is rooted in a video that Rynearson and her husband, Lance, watched during their pre-adoption training. The video depicts a young girl removed from her home and placed into foster care.

"Through the entire video she moves her belongings around in garbage bags," Rynearson says.

Rynearson not only believes that



the garbage bags cast a negative image for children but also belittle the value of children's belongings to others. When she and Lance initially met – and eventually

See **Duffles Of Love**, page 3



Rory Rynearson, adopted daughter of Jamie and Lance Rynearson, provided much of the inspiration for the Duffles Of Love Project.



Georgey would do well in any type of forever family.

Love of reading propels Georgey in his studies

When he first meets others, Georgey is shy, but he quickly warms up to people, especially if he feels comfortable.

He isn't so shy about playing, especially basketball. Georgey also loves to read, which helps explain why he excels in school.

"Georgey has always done well in school and takes great pride in his school work," says his worker. "His favorite class in school is social studies."

Ava Maria displays her artistic and athletic talents

"Ava Maria is a very artistic girl," says her worker. "She enjoys drawing and coloring and is good at creating digital artwork on her tablet." She's also musically inclined and plays clarinet in her school's band class. Ava, as she likes to be called, enjoys sharing a laugh with others and playing imaginative games with her friends. In addition to her creative skills, Ava showcases her athletic ability by playing sports such as soccer. When she's asked about the qualities she wants in a future forever family, Ava says she simply wants one who's easygoing.

Climbing trees, tossing footballs top Joey's faves

Forget the luaus and volcanos, Joey, as Joseph prefers, wants to travel to Hawaii for another reason.

"I want to learn how to surf," he says. That seems quite appropriate because Joey loves spending time outdoors. He enjoys climbing trees, playing with friends and tossing around a football. "He enjoys being active," says Joey's worker. When he gets older, Joey wants to become a football card collector and game designer.



Joey hopes to spend time with a forever family enjoying outdoor activities together.



"Ava has a good sense of humor," says her worker.

For more information about Georgey, C09280, Joseph, C09279, and Ava Maria, C09372, visit www.mare.org and go to For Families > View Waiting Children. Search for them by name.

Duffles Of Love, continued from page 1

adopted – their daughter, Rory, the negative impact of the garbage bags and the need for something better emerged.

“She was still in foster care and this was the last thing we wanted her to feel,” Ryneerson says. “We wanted her to know that she had value and worth and that we recognized that. That day we purchased her a teal and gray duffle with her name embroidered on the side.”

From there, the bags of bliss idea emerged, and Ryneerson formed a group of friends, including fellow co-founder and close friend Amy Cote, to establish Duffles Of Love and helped launch the fundraising effort in February 2017.

“Our team is made up of our most talented friends and family from around the country,” she says. “Together we handle everything from our logo and website, to physically stuffing and delivering the duffles.”

Since the project began in earnest in April, contributions made by businesses and individuals have helped Duffles of Love purchase, supply and distribute 191 bags to agencies in Oakland and Midland counties. Oakland Family Services



The Ryneerson family.

Items included in the bags:

- Dental and hygiene products.
- A blanket and stuffed animal.
- A flashlight, notebook and pen.

has received many of the bags, which have been distributed to children in foster care.

“We have been able to utilize them during initial placements, replacements and when

unlicensed relatives are providing care,” says Sanborn. “Overall, this project has been extremely helpful and helps spread the word about children in foster care in general.”

Families who want to help can visit dufflesoflove.org to make a donation. Ryneerson says they also can help by sharing the website and the Duffles Of Love Facebook page.

Program provides support for adoptive families

STORY BY **CONNOR ROBINSON, MARE SUPPORT STAFF**

As the leaves fall and the temperatures plunge, many families focus on holiday shopping for their children.

Families who have been matched with a pre-adoptive child worry about holiday shopping as well as welcoming the child into their home and getting to know him or her.

All that change can present some challenges for adoptive parents. The Michigan Adoption Resource

Exchanges recognizes that, which is why MARE’s Match Support Program (MSP) has been so helpful for families.

Match Support Program staff strive to help parents where they’re at in the adoption process and provide the needed support. MSP staff have been able to provide books, trainings and connections to community resources to benefit families. For instance, one of the community resources

helped MSP staff acquire bikes that were donated to a family.

If you are looking for extra support, then the Match Support Program is here to help.

For assistance or more information, contact Amanda Dunham, Match Support Program supervisor at 734-528-2020 or email Amanda_Dunham@judsoncenter.org.



This year, Michigan's Adoption Day was Nov. 21. Among those celebrating Adoption Day were, left to right, the Michigan Supreme Court, Oakland County and Ionia County.



The evolution of National Adoption Month

STORY COURTESY OF CHILD WELFARE INFORMATION GATEWAY

For more than two decades, National Adoption Month has been promoted and celebrated every November in communities across the country. Many national, state and local

agencies as well as foster, kinship and adoptive family groups will help spread the word through programs, events and activities that help raise awareness for thousands of children and youth

in foster care who are waiting for permanent, loving families.

Read below to learn how National Adoption Month started and grew to what it is today.

1976		1984		1995 & '98		2008	
↓		↓		↓		↓	
Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis announces an Adoption Week to promote awareness of the need for adoptive families for children in foster care.		President Reagan proclaims the first National Adoption Week.		President Clinton expands the awareness week to the entire month of November. Clinton directs the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to expand the use of the Internet as a tool to find homes for children waiting to be adopted from foster care.		President Bush drafts an explanation of National Adoption Month in Spanish.	

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January 27, 2018
MARE Meet & Greet,
Holland
11 a.m.-2 p.m.

February 17, 2018
MARE Meet & Greet, Royal Oak
11 a.m.-2 p.m.

For more information regarding these events please contact Jessica Thompson, MARE Recruitment Specialist: jessica_thompson@judsoncenter.org

Looking to meet some of the children on MARE who are available for adoption? Attend a Meet & Greet! Contact us at 800-589-6273 or at mare@judsoncenter.org for more information and upcoming events.

