

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

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



A long, difficult trip but well worth it Adopting an older child poses challenges, brings rewards

WRITTEN BY **AMY BLAINE, ADOPTIVE PARENT**

Just over two years ago, my husband and I started on the adoption journey. Once we started the process, we talked about the type of child we'd adopt, and like others, we envisioned adopting a young child. After doing some research, we found many older children available for adoption in Michigan.

However, I wondered what kind of challenges we'd face in parenting an older child who might have been in the foster care system much of his life. What kind of baggage would she bring with her? What could I handle? What kind of behavior would he exhibit? What if she didn't bond with me or my husband? Would that child grow to love me? What if he didn't get along with my step-sons? How would this change all of our lives? My mind was full of endless questions.

When my husband and I went through the required training, we felt somewhat prepared for any child we added to our family. After inquiring about many children, we were finally matched with a 10-year-old boy who would become our son. When we saw the description of his behaviors, we were intimidated. From swearing at adults, to fighting, to jumping off a second story

house, this child clearly had a long trauma history. The first six months that he lived with us were the hardest.

He tested the boundaries established by me, my husband, other family members and teachers. There were times that I questioned if we were doing the right thing. I had to remind myself many times that we were adopting to give love and consistency to a child who had never had either. We wanted to give him those things in abundance, to commit to being his parents even in the hardest of times and to never walk away from him.

There were times I just cried myself to sleep thinking that this child hated me. Maybe part of him did in those moments. His trust of my husband and me took time, and honestly, how could we expect anything different? This child had been placed in several foster homes, abused in some, and was in and out of placement with a relative.

In addition, the only sibling he lived most of his early childhood with had been adopted by another family. This child was angry. His trust was broken so many times by so many people.

See **Journey** on page 2

LET THE LOVE FLOW

Make it Jacob's time to shine

For more information about Jacob, 12, (C07657) or other children awaiting adoption, visit www.mare.org > For Families > View Waiting Children.



Get a load of that smile, which tells a lot about Jacob. He's described as having "a wonderful, friendly smile that is an outward expression of his caring, upbeat and imaginative personality." A lovable, energetic child, Jacob enjoys doing anything he can outside, and he really likes swimming, playing basketball and riding his bike. He also likes to pull a wagon around the yard, ride in the wagon while someone pulls him and pulling others in the wagon. Jacob enjoys playing with his touch-screen electronics, remote control trucks and die-cast cars. Jacob considers himself a "helper" as he helps his peers when they are upset and assists the teacher with classroom tasks. He likes to help out by doing chores and helping prepare meals. Jacob describes himself as nice, grateful, happy and helpful. He has a good sense of humor and likes to laugh and make other people laugh.

Jacob can have some difficulty staying focused and paying attention for long periods of time. He can become frustrated and have difficulties expressing his emotions in a constructive manner. At times, Jacob can have difficulty with peer relations, but he is making friends with his peers. He understands rules and expectations and generally follows them. In school, Jacob receives support for his schoolwork and his speech and does best in a relaxed classroom with extra assistance.

Jacob needs a very patient and experienced family, with a strong support system who are ready to make a commitment to help him throughout his life. The family should provide a highly structured home with consistent supervision and individualized attention so Jacob can have the right environment to reach his fullest potential. The adoptive family must be willing to participate in any support services that can help Jacob continue to grow and develop. It is very important to Jacob that he maintains contact with his brother and sister, who are in separate adoptive homes, and is able to talk to them. He cherishes the time he gets to spend with his brother and enjoys talking to him on the telephone.

Journey, continued from page 1

Why would this child have any reason to believe we'd be any different?

We had to demonstrate through our words and actions that we were different. We could be trusted and would love him no matter what. We grew to love this boy as our son, and he now calls us mom and dad. He gives some of the best hugs, and says "I love you" without hesitation. At his core, he has always been a very sweet and loving child. I have to remember that. His ability to react appropriately and make good decisions was stifled by the repeated trauma that he endured, but he is learning every day.

I'm not going to lie and tell you that it is or will always be easy. He hasn't always made it easy to love him, but we made a commitment to this child that we weren't going to back out on.

If you have found yourself in the process of adopting an older child, I would encourage you to keep going. These children need you desperately. You may see the files of older children and really wonder if you can handle what is there. I would encourage you to search yourself to find out if that's true, or if you feel this way out of fear. Had my husband and I only considered what we saw on paper about our son, we probably would not have said "yes."

These children will test you, just like our son tested us, to see if you will be like the others who have come and gone from their

Build a support network

As you make your decision about adopting an older child with special needs, I would highly suggest getting a strong support group to surround you.

We surrounded ourselves with people who have supported our decision to adopt. Our son's therapist and adoption worker and our family, friends who have adopted, and even those who haven't, keep us strong. We have many friends at our church who are involved in some way in adoption or foster care, and having that support is amazing.

— Amy Blaine

lives. What child in any similar situation could be expected not to react and cry out in negative ways? Children who have been through trauma such as abandonment, abuse and neglect will ask for the love that they haven't received in some of the most unloving ways.

You just have to keep loving and supporting them. Through the adoption process, you will be stretched, you will grow, you will cry, you will laugh and you will learn to love a child who some have wrongfully deemed as unlovable.



PLANNING FOR A BETTER LIFE AHEAD

You can be the parent to help children with higher needs

WRITTEN BY **KELLI OSTROSKY, MARE NAVIGATOR**

Children's profiles on www.mare.org commonly show their emotional impairment levels ranging from mild to severe.

While their exact diagnoses cannot be shared online, these children suffer from more significant mental and physical responses to stressors that can contribute to their impairments. The most significant missing piece for these children with weak emotional foundations is a forever family. Self-regulation and coping techniques do not come naturally but are developed over time when genuine relationships and bonds are formed. This is where you come in!

When parenting an emotionally impaired child, it is essential to utilize a team approach, which incorporates a strong "behavior plan." By recognizing and anticipating the causes of undesirable behavior and developing methods to give the child desired coping skills, progress is sure to follow.

It is important to note that children's

behavior (positive or negative) is their way of communicating their needs with the world. Children who most need love often show it in the most unloving ways. Creating a calm and predictable environment with natural – instead of punitive – consequences will also provide the structure and positive feedback kids need.

While the "perfect family" doesn't exist, there are specific qualities of a potential adoptive family that may fit children better based on their unique needs. Some children may need to be the youngest or only child in the home to ensure the appropriate level of supervision and safety. This is one reason why some children may do best with a two-parent household.

Flexible parent schedules also can come in handy to monitor the child's well-being during appointments. When making placement decisions for emotionally impaired youth, adoption workers commonly seek a family with training or experience parenting youth with child-

hood trauma.

Parents who are patient, empathic and have a positive attitude and outlook on life will greatly benefit a child with high emotional needs. We used that approach with my son, and even through the tough times, he is proof that kids are capable of making mountains of progress and truly do bring so much joy to a family.

Continue to build your "adoption resume," keep an open heart and mind, and before you know it, that special match will happen!

To learn more about the criteria used for emotional impairment levels on the MARE website, visit www.mare.org/ForFamilies/ViewWaitingChildren/ImpairmentLevel-Guidelines.aspx. The Adoption Navigator Team invites families to learn more about statewide training opportunities by visiting the MARE calendar at www.mare.org/Resources/EventsCalendar.aspx



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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January 26, 2015

Oakland County Support Group with Orchards' PARC

5:30- 7:30 PM

Orchards Children's Services, 24901 Northwestern Hwy., Suite 500, Southfield, MI 48075

Details: Childcare and dinner are provided. Please RSVP to 313-530-9746

January 31, 2015

Teens Only Match Party! Southfield, MI

10:00 a.m.-2:30 p.m.

Breakfast and Lunch will be served, and limited child care will be available. Please RSVP to: Jessie-Mae Secord, secord@strong-families.org or call 517-612-2544

Wayne County Match Party! Plymouth, MI

11:00 a.m.-2 p.m.

The Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, MARE, would like to invite you to register for an upcoming match party. It is our hope that many "forever families" will be formed after an afternoon of food, games and fun!

Adoptive Families: Families will receive a confirmation email after

MARE has spoken with their adoption worker to verify that they have a completed adoption homestudy. All families must be approved for adoption to attend. Please note: It is MARE policy that only prospective adoptive parents attend match parties. We ask that you do not bring your children/teens with you.

Registration can also be found on the MARE homepage or by contacting MARE directly.

If you have any questions, please contact MARE interns, Tara Radina (Tara_Radina@judsoncenter.org or 734-528-1721) or Hannah Shier (Hannah_Shier@judsoncenter.org or 734-794-2911).

February 12, 2015

Information Webinar with Hands Across the Water

6:30-7:30 p.m.

Join this general information meeting WEBINAR to learn more about the adoption and foster care services that Hands Across the Water can offer you. Topics include the home study process and all the programs, both international and domestic, that Hands Across the Water can offer your family.

Please RSVP, to info@hatw.org to receive the info to join the webinar.

February 20, 2015

"Tough Love" film viewing and discussion

7:00-10 p.m.

Ogden Church, 3201 East US 223, Adrian, MI 49221

Details: The evening will begin with the movie, followed by a discussion time. The evening will conclude with a raffle for foster parents and a time of fellowship and refreshments.

Childcare is available by calling Jennifer at 517-918 5926 or jennifermarlatt53@gmail.com. The registration deadline for childcare is February 6.

March 19, 2015

A-OK Parent's Group

6:30-8:30 p.m.

Hands Across the Water, 781 Avis Drive, Suite 200, Ann Arbor, MI 48108

Details: The A-OK Parent's Group seeks to provide support to families investigating or experiencing the challenges of foster care and adoption. Families come together to share their experiences and gather advice from others who have been there. This group is facilitated by a licensing worker who has also been a foster parent and an adoptive parent. Please call 734-477-0135 or email kristen@hatw.org to pre-register.

LGBT Options Info Webinar with Hands Across the Water

6:30-7:30 p.m.

Join this information meeting WEBINAR to learn more about the adoption and foster care options that Hands Across the Water can offer the LGBT community. Topics include the home study process and all the programs that Hands Across the Water can offer your family.

Please RSVP, to info@hatw.org to receive the info to join the webinar.

March 31, 2015

Wayne County Support Group with Orchards' PARC

5:30-7:30 p.m.

Taylor Sportsplex, 13333 Telegraph, Taylor, MI 48180

Details: Childcare and dinner are provided. Please RSVP to (313) 530-9746

For more information, contact MARE Recruitment Specialist, Jessica Thompson at jessica_thompson@judsoncenter.org