

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.



New year brings new ideas

MARE seeks to improve recruitment for youth

Since it's a new year, MARE has decided to kick around a few new and fresh ideas to help youth in foster care find forever families.

For instance, MARE has started a new feature called Beyond the Bio.

We'll be doing more in-depth narratives and special social media posts and featuring the youth on our home page and possibly in special videos.

When you see us share one of these features on Facebook, please share them on your Facebook timelines as we're trying to get as much exposure for these youth as possible.

MARE also is also studying other ways to improve recruitment strategies for youth who are photolisted on the website. One method being recommended is a recruitment update event for youth following a MARE Meet & Greet to get current photos and gather new information for youths' narratives. The event could include presenting recruitment options as well as getting updated consents from youth.

Once we finalize new recruitment activities, we will let you know the details. Meanwhile, if you have suggestions, please send them to us at mare@judsoncenter.org or call 800-589-6273.



The Beyond the Bio post for Kyler appeared on MARE's Facebook page on Dec. 19 while the post for Erica appeared on Jan. 7. MARE hopes to encourage more youth to choose "Any" on their recruitment consents.

I, Bryan Doe, age 15 reviewed the GUIDE TO YOUTH ADOPTION RECRUITMENT booklet with my Adoption Worker on Feb. 14, 2020. Below are my preferences regarding recruitment features:

I PREFER TO BE FEATURED in ANY recruitment activities

How a day at the beach led to adoption from foster care

The notion of adoption from foster care hit home with Matt and Jen Brooks in the summer of 2018 as they sat on a beach watching other parents and their children building sandcastles and playing surfside games.

The couple, who have been married for seven years, had wanted to start a family through adoption but couldn't agree how. For Jen, adoption from foster care seemed a natural calling since she's the permanency specialist for the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) and had worked in the field for 10 years.

However, Jen's training and Matt's four years as an attorney at an auto insurance claims law firm conditioned them to explore all options. So the couple talked about other ways to start their family such as infant and international adoptions.

Then came that August day on the beach when they saw other parents frolicking with their children on a sandy shore, which cemented their decision.

"We said to each other, 'This is boring,'" says Jen. "We wanted a family, and the way that our jobs and careers are, we needed a school-aged child. So we decided to just put out feelers about foster care adoption."

From "feelers," their adoption process soon went to what Jen calls "full-throttle."

"I contacted a friend of mine who works in foster care and got some information. Within two weeks, we were at an orientation at



an agency."

They started the Parent Resources for Information Development and Education (PRIDE) training in early October and by the end of November 2018 their home study was approved, which licensed them for foster care and approved them for adoption.

Wait, home study revisited

Shortly after approval of their home study, Matt and Jen found a sibling group on the MARE website who excited them. "They were cute, and they were

everything that we were looking for," says Jen, who along with Matt decided to make an inquiry a couple of days later.

"And then we were denied," says Jen, still dismayed about the news. "I was like, 'How is this possible?' I've been in the field for 10 years, I have trauma training and Matt's successful in his career."

Instead of wallowing in disappointment, the Brooks family turned to resources for help.

See **Brooks family** on page 3

Brooks family, continued from page 2

One of those was MARE Program Manager Michelle Parra, who suggested Jen revisit the couple's home study for answers.

"I looked at it, and it was just so basic," says Jen. "It was very well written, but there was no mention of our experience and our achievements."

That's when Matt and Jen decided to "toot our own horn and re-introduce ourselves" by writing a letter to their adoption agency. Their goal was to persuade the workers why Matt and Jen should be picked as adoptive parents, and less than a week later, they received a call.

The letter worked, and they were about to meet the youth who would become their son.

"We were very excited and felt really good because they thought of us for this child," says Jen.

A family in the making

His MARE narrative says Cameron, or Cam, is a colorful kid who loves rainbow sherbet. While his tastes have changed since then to frozen yogurt, he still smiles when he gets something sweet.

"He gets this look on his face," says Jen. "It's just a huge smile from ear to ear."

He especially beams when he gets to play at Dave & Buster's, which is where Cam met his future forever family.

"When we were walking in, I had probably the biggest butterflies I've had since my wedding day," says Jen. "We were very nervous yet excited."

As Jen and Matt entered the eatery and entertainment establishment, Cam and his



worker were playing a game. Soon they all sat down for lunch to get acquainted, and a connection ensued.

"Right when we saw him it was very natural," says Jen. "It was very easy to have a conversation with him. When I left there, I felt as though my heart was full."

Whoa! We're moving fast!

Three days later, the Brooks got a call seeking their foster home for Cam right away. After getting the news about Cam's impending move into their home, they needed a fast-action plan.

"We were ready, but we weren't," says Matt. "Everything in the house that needed to be done was

done, but all of a sudden it was all the logistics."

The move happened at the end of Christmas break, and on the day he arrived, Cam needed new shoes and clothes, and he had to enroll the next day in a nearby school. They had to arrange his dentist and doctor appointments, which meant finding a pediatrician.

Once the initial needs were met, Matt and Jen reached out and received help. In the ensuing days and weeks, they quickly became a family.

"My bond with him came easily," says Jen, and Matt adds that his did as well within a few days.

From the beach to home

Even though Jen and Matt's bond came quickly, it's been a slower process for Cam, which is not unusual when a youth from foster care transitions into a new home and family. Besides bonding, other issues can arise, and Matt and Jen experienced those as well and sought help to alleviate them.

Now, listening to Matt and Jen talk about Cam brings to mind the kind of relationship that's often special for families who adopt a youth from foster care.

"When I first met him, I thought this is right," says Jen.

Cam thinks it's right, too, even though he was anxious at Dave & Buster's and admits that when he first met his new forever family, he was happy yet nervous. He says the transition into his new home felt "weird" but in a good way.

Now, he says he enjoys spending time with his new family, and he especially loves boys' nights out with his new dad as they attend sporting events such as Michigan State basketball games.



MARE's Calendar of Events

– A contract reminder –

MARE would like to take this opportunity to remind agencies that adherence to contractual obligations, as well as policy and procedures, ensures that children of Michigan's child welfare system will be uniformly served, resulting in opportunities to connect children with forever families.

Section 210(c)(8) of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Contractual Agreement refers to MARE Related Responsibilities and states: "The contractor shall notify MARE no less than quarterly of planned adoption related events, scheduled or tentatively scheduled for the next quarter. These activities shall include but are not limited to orientations, training dates, workshops, adoption fairs, recruitment activities, post adoption support activities and guest speakers. The contractor will indicate if the events are open to the public or limited to a specific audience and any costs for family participation."

Remember to submit your events at least quarterly to MARE Support Staff Karen Gowan at karen_gowan@judsoncenter.org. This can also be done via MARE's Calendar of Events Form, through a Contact Us form submission on the MARE website or by simply emailing your event flyer to mare@judsoncenter.org.

MARE applauds the efforts of Michigan's adoption workers to find forever families for children waiting to be adopted and welcomes the opportunity to provide information, referral and support to all those who promote adoption.

Calendar of Events

March 8, 2020

Art & Soul Meet & Greet, Pontiac
10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

April 4, 2020

MARE Meet & Greet, Birmingham
11 a.m.-2 p.m.

April 25, 2020

Heart Gallery Grand Opening,
Royal Oak

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

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