

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 children, visit our website at www.mare.org.



How to talk to your loved ones about adoption from foster care

STORY BY **NICK BAUMGARTNER, NORTHWEST ADOPTION EXCHANGE**

Adopting from foster care is a really exciting and meaningful way to add to your family. It is a life-changing step to take and it's possible your family and friends may have reservations. Because of the stigma around adopting from foster care, your network of support may be hesitant to celebrate this big step. Here are a few things to think about when you consider sharing your news.

Be aware of the issues around adopting from foster care

What are some of those misconceptions? Oftentimes, people assume adoption is too expensive (adopting from foster care can be pretty close to free) or takes too long (it depends). Some people are under the impression that every youth in

foster care is destructive, has too many behavioral or medical needs or that kids in foster care have done something wrong. In reality, all of those assumptions are inaccurate and unfair. Youth enter foster care through no fault of their own and need the love and support of the right family – just like everyone else.

Let them know how important their support is

Ultimately, we hope that your family and friends can support you throughout this big step in your life. Even if your family has reservations, be sure to let them know just how important their support is to you. Adoption is a journey filled with ups and downs, and feeling supported by friends and family is incredibly important.

Be prepared for their questions

Though every family is different, there are some common questions you may encounter. Some people will wonder why you decided to adopt from foster care instead of adopting an infant privately; others will wonder if you are worried about a variety of outcomes, what the process is like and if it's expensive to adopt. These questions might seem overwhelming and intrusive at times, but they're usually coming from lack of information and not ill-will. It's certainly not your responsibility to help educate everyone you know about adoption from foster care, but be aware that your family and friends may feel entitled to come

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FAMILY = LOVE

Robert dreams of happy space travels

If anyone can conquer space, it's Robert.

He'll blast off in a rocket heading for the moon before rendezvousing with Mars then shipping off to Jupiter because, like he says, somebody's got to be the first. Robert says it's his curiosity that drives him toward space exploration.

When his mind drifts while he's in his spacecraft, Robert might imagine a planet shaped as a pepperoni pizza – his favorite food – and a constellation fashioned like a tiger – his favorite animal. After exploring the outer world, Robert will catch a return trip to Earth while enjoying his favorite color on his descent to the big blue marble.

After he disembarks from his spacecraft, Robert will catch up on his favorite things to do including playing Monopoly and video games and participating in sports such as basketball and football.

He'll study science to learn how to take a return trip to outer space, and he'll focus on becoming part of a forever family who enjoys exploring new ideas and new vacation destinations. How about a trip to another galaxy?



Robert, C08206.



Areonna, C08775.

Fun-loving Areonna aims for fame by singing

Wherever she goes, Areonna likely will have fun.

She enjoys drawing, writing, coloring and doing arts and crafts. She also likes reading, doing puzzles and watching movies. Areonna enjoys engaging in imaginative play with her baby dolls.

This laidback girl says that if she could visit anywhere, she'd "go wherever God takes me." Perhaps it'll be the stage because Areonna loves singing and wants to become a singer when she gets older.

Areonna has a knack for comforting others, and she would love to help the homeless. "She likes to make others happy," says a person who knows her. When she's asked what she's most proud of, Areonna says, "People who believe in themselves."

When she's asked what she wants to do with a forever family, Areonna says she wants to go to church with them, play with their children if they have them and – true to her comforting ways – be a support for the family.

Areonna is described as a fun, upbeat young lady who would do best with two experienced and patient parents.

Family shares tips with adoptive parents

In the winter Family Newsletter, we introduced you to the Brooks family – Jen, who's MARE's permanency specialist, her husband Matt, an attorney at an auto insurance claims firm and Cameron, the 8-year-old son they fostered and adopted.

Here, Matt and Jen offer advice for couples who are in the thinking stage of adopting from foster care.

Other than selecting an agency and getting licensed, what are some of the first things to be considered?

Jen: The first thing is you should both be on the same page. You both need to be committed to it because it can test you a little bit at times.

Matt: One of the most important things to consider is you're not going to feel 100 percent prepared. It's just something that you have to jump into and figure it out as it goes. Somebody told us, "If you wait for the perfect time, it's never going to happen."

Jen: We kept going back and forth for a while because I was waiting for a sign or something telling me, "Oh, you're ready." That actually didn't happen.

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to you to with every question they've ever had about foster care and the adoption process.

Tell them on your terms

There is not a right or wrong way to tell your family and friends about this personal decision. Some people prefer to tell their loved ones in the very beginning of the process so they can really take advantage of their support; others



We just jumped into the foster care and adoption process.

What are some of the most important things to consider during the adoption process?

Matt: Ask lots of questions. Workers are busy, and if you're not asking them, they aren't necessarily going to reach out. Even if it's just asking questions about the process, make sure to contact them.

Jen: Get a MARE adoption navigator. I asked ours a lot of questions. We definitely utilized MARE, and I'm not saying that just because I work there. Nobody else knew what we were going through except

somebody who's already been through the adoption process like the navigators.

Any other tips?

Jen: Learn about and utilize as many resources as you need. We consulted MARE's Match Support Program and other resources. We knew things wouldn't be perfect, but by getting advice from others, I'm certain that it made the process go smoother.

will wait until later in the process when they have more information. Whatever you decide to do is the right thing. You know your family and friends best -- make the choice when you are ready.

Offer resources

Even if your family and friends are super excited and supportive, offering resources to help them learn more about the process and

what to expect can be helpful. You may have come across resources in your own research, and it's always OK to ask your agency if it has suggestions for information you can share with friends and family. Finally, feel free to share the MARE.org website so that your friends and family can educate themselves and learn about the personal stories of youth in foster care who deserve adoptive families.

Meet MARE's new adoption navigator

Kimberly Grover is eager to help families on their journey

MARE's newest Adoption Navigator Kimberly Grover had an idea that parenting was like babysitting, and she wanted no part of it.

"I had to be convinced that becoming a parent was a good idea," she says. That convincing happened with the help of her wife, and now the couple has two 9-year-old adopted children.

Now Grover is ready to help other families by drawing on her own experience.

What's your professional background?

I have a bachelor's degree in fine arts and a master's in social work. Before I got my master's, I worked as a bank teller and custom framer. My other professional experience is with agencies serving children and families such as hospice, community centers and Girl Scouts. Recruitment and volunteer coordination were two of the skills I developed and grew to love in a few of those positions.

What draws you to child welfare?

I wouldn't say I was drawn to child welfare. It was just



Kimberly Grover and family at Cape Cod.

one path of many that my life has taken. I love the work I have done in the field. I love the work that I'm doing now. I think it will always be a part of what I'm doing with my life.

What made you interested in becoming an adoption navigator?

Kim Ross, a friend and former coworker, has worked as a MARE adoption navigator for quite a time. She encouraged me to apply. When I read the posting, I knew that this job was such a good fit. The best part is working with my team and all of the other MARE staff. Everyone is funny, nice and accepting.

What satisfies you most about your job?

I love this job for so many reasons. I enjoy changing the face of foster care and adoption from foster care by helping families reimagine their lives and discover the truth. My job also entails doing things I love such as writing, editing and organizing information.

Contact Kimberly Grover at

kimberly_grover@judsoncenter.org or 734-330-1454.

Calendar of Events

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, MARE has begun hosting virtual Meet & Greets 2020.

MARE also plans to host the 2020 Michigan Heart Gallery Grand Opening as a virtual event on Sept. 12, 2020.

For more details, check Mare.org and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram or contact Jessica Thompson, MARE recruitment specialist: jessica_thompson@judsoncenter.org

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