

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.



FAMILY NEWSLETTER

August 2020

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When families seek answers, navigators spring into action

Help with adoption isn't the only assistance they provide

STORY BY **JUDY McNAUGHTON, MICHIGAN ADOPTION RESOURCE EXCHANGE**

Being an adoption navigator isn't an easy job, but it can be very rewarding. Sometimes we cry, sometimes we laugh and sometimes we celebrate as much as a family who gains a new adoptive child.

We help families from their first thoughts about adoption to finalization, and we get to connect with others who are in different situations.

To give you a taste of what it's like to answer the phone or email and how we might assist you, here are some examples from "a day in the life of a MARE adoption navigator" – me!

Foster care questions

"I saw a young man on your website, and I wondered how I can adopt. I do not believe that my family can provide foster care."

Navigators have the opportunity to provide information about how to start the adoption process and then encourage families along the way. Often during a conversation regarding the realities and benefits of becoming licensed for foster care, families see the value and are more open to further consideration of it.

Family questions

"Our grandchildren are photolisted, and we want to adopt them." When appropriate this is a wonderful opportunity for children to be adopted by family members, and navigators have the privilege to connect the child's worker with the family member who has expressed interest.

Subsidy questions

"I'm a foster parent and I haven't received my monthly payment." We keep a list of workers at the subsidy office so we can provide contact information quickly and efficiently.

Adoptee questions

"I was adopted as a young child, and now that I am an adult I'd like to know about my birth family." In instances such as these, information regarding the Michigan Central Adoption Registry is provided so adoptees can begin their journey to learning more about their birth family.



See **A Navigator's Day** on page 3

*MARE Adoption Navigator
Judy McNaughton.*

Never a dull day with Dre

There's little idle time in Dre's world. Instead of shooting the breeze, he shoots hoops.

He loves playing basketball any chance he gets. When he's not playing it, basketball occupies Dre's thoughts.

He dreams of visiting Oakland, Calif., to see the Golden State Warriors in action, and he wishes to meet the team's star player, Stephen Curry. In addition to playing basketball, Dre likes watching movies and going to the mall with his friends.

Dre also enjoys dancing and listening to music, and he wants to become a music producer when he gets older. "He has begun writing songs in his spare time," says one of his adult acquaintances.

Despite his active lifestyle, Dre takes time to chill, and he says he hopes to go to the movies and spend time outdoors. Of course, playing basketball with them would complete his dream family.



Yah'Meshia (C08429)

Meshia's many interests

Meshia has a gift for singing and has placed second in a talent show.

Meshia aims to please, too, especially at Christmas, which she enjoys celebrating by getting people presents and watching their eyes light up when they open their gifts. Making Meshia's eyes light up seems pretty simple: Just be silly and make her laugh.

Other things Meshia enjoys include playing zombie tag and softball, which she enjoys very much. Meshia has started other extracurricular activities as well.

Meshia also enjoys her free time, and she dreams of traveling one day. If she could visit anywhere in the world, Meshia would go to Paris to see the Eiffel Tower and perhaps sample some French pastries.

As a matter of fact, Meshia wants to go on trips with her future forever family since she has never been out of Michigan. She also wants lots of family time doing activities such as making crafts together and playing board games.



Dre (C09308)

A new way to showcase youth — Dre and Meshia are part of MARE's new 20 in 2020 project to celebrate 20 Michigan youth who want to share their stories with potential adoptive families in 2020. Every youth will be featured on a new extension of MARE's website to highlight and showcase their creativity, and we will be regularly publishing new profiles throughout 2020. We hope you will check them out on at mare.indepthprofiles.org and be inspired to help us find them the adoptive families they deserve!



Jessica Thompson, MARE recruitment specialist.

We're virtually determined to host MARE Meet & Greets

STORY BY JESSICA THOMPSON, MICHIGAN ADOPTION RESOURCE EXCHANGE

Meet & Greets are MARE events that are for families who are approved for adoption and youth who are photolisted on Mare.org.

Prior to the pandemic, we were able to host these events in person. However, since then we've been working on bringing these events to you virtually, and we would like to share that we started to host Meet & Greets beginning in the first week in July.

You can find registration information for these events on

our website. It also will be sent out through our email, so if you're on our list you will receive notification that way. You will register as a family the same way you would for in-person Meet & Greets.

We are really excited to still be able to bring youth and families together during this time. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to call us at 800-589-6273 or visit Mare.org.

We look forward to seeing you all soon.

Be sure to get the help you need from adoption navigators

Despite the pandemic, we're still just a phone call or email away from getting you the answers and guidance you need.

COVID-19 has not impacted MARE adoption navigators' ability to speak to and provide information to families interested in adoption.

Our adoption navigators are working remotely and the hotline – 800-589-6273 – and navigators' direct lines remain available as well. Please continue to keep in contact with your adoption navigator. If you prefer to pause your efforts at this time, communicate this via phone or email.

If you are interested in working with an adoption navigator, contact Kimberly Wolowski, adoption navigator supervisor at Kimberly_wolowski@judsoncenter.org or by phone at 734-528-2077.

A Navigator's Day, continued from page 1

Birth mom questions

"I'm in my third trimester of pregnancy, and I KNOW I can't provide a home for this child. I was adopted at birth, and I know about making a wise decision regarding my child's future." We applaud birth moms for thinking about their child's future and reaching out for help for their own well-being as well as the child's. Resources, such as a pregnancy counselor, within their area are provided so they will know all their options and make an informed decision.

Basic needs questions

"I am struggling to meet the needs of my children." A welcoming, listening ear is provided to gather information about the family and then resources are discussed and shared to help get them on a path to keeping them safe and improving their lives

As you can see, adoption navigators strive to be safe resources for families to tell their stories, express their emotions and make a plan for their future, without judgment. We provide adoption information and support, so don't hesitate to make that phone call to 800-589-6273. We'll jump at the chance to serve you!

Practical experience helps MARE's new navigator find added joy in the job

Jessica Franks brings a wealth of child welfare experience to her role as MARE's new adoption navigator.

She's an adoptive parent who's always eager to learn new ways to help families and youth.

Franks worked for Child Protective Services and Families First of Michigan before joining MARE's Match Support Program.

"I feel lucky that I have gained so much perspective through all these different areas of social work," says Franks.

A graduate of Western Michigan University, she and her husband began their adoption journey in 2017 by becoming foster parents and then eventually adopting two children in 2018.

"The process taught me so much and gave me insight and desire to educate other families that might be considering fostering and/or adoption because I see how important and life-changing this experience has been for my family!" Franks says.

What draws you to child welfare?

Social work wasn't something that I always knew I



Jessica Franks and family.

wanted to do, but when I began advocating for children and families, I gained a passion for this kind of work and knew it was something I wanted to continue. I enjoy taking action to help others in need, so I continued in jobs that allow me to do that, and it brought me to MARE.

What made you interested in becoming an adoption navigator?

I was lucky to get to know the adoption navigators while working for the Match Support Program. I learned what an amazing and supportive team the navigators are, and I wanted to be a part of it. It is also nice to have a network of other adoptive

families who are understanding and supportive. I am thrilled to be a part of such a great team.

What satisfies you most about your job?

I love being a support, a voice and an advocate for children and families. When you work together, it's amazing what you can get accomplished.

Calendar of Events

Here's an important reminder! November is Michigan and National Adoption Month, and we'll still be celebrating it despite the pandemic. We're not sure if we will be hosting any events at that time, but perhaps the celebration will be virtual.

Regardless, make sure you stay abreast of the latest information about upcoming events and celebrations at Mare.org and on our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram feeds.

MARE contact info

Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange
3840 Packard Road, Suite 170
Ann Arbor, MI 48108
Toll Free: 800-589-6273
TTY: 734-794-2984
Fax: 734-528-1695
mare@judsoncenter.org