



# Professional Newsletter



Left to right, Cory, Nevaeh, Jessica and Hayden Franks.

## Family’s move helps preserve their adopted children’s racial identity

A story Jessica Franks shares with humor underscores the thoughtfulness and care adoptive families need when considering transracial adoption.

“Every year, when I get all the African-American Santas out,” says the MARE adoption navigator while trying to hold her giggles, “my kids are like, ‘Yes! Black Santa!’ I know it sounds so silly, but they love it! Representation like that does matter.”

Decorating their home with black Santas and angels has become a Christmas tradition for Jessica, her husband, Cory, and their adopted children, Nevaeh, 9, and Hayden, 8 – and it serves as a lesson for other

families considering transracial adoption.

However, the importance of racial representation and identity came slowly to Cory and Jessica, who admits to going into transracial adoption a bit naïve. She thought it would be easy, that their African-American children would fit in well in the predominantly white community where the family resided.

“Then I realized that there’s more to transracial adoption than just parents who love their kids,” says Jessica. “I saw things like my kids being left out at school and in sporting activities. They were feeling left out. They were not feeling like they fit in.”

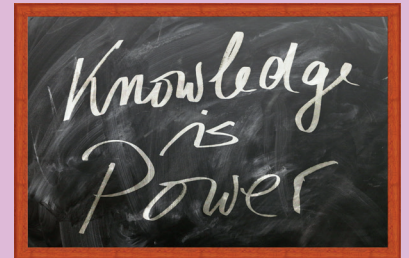
## Winter 2023

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Let adoptive parents know that they can learn about foster care adoption at [www.mare.org](http://www.mare.org).

Jessica and Cory did some soul-searching and concluded that for Nevaeh and Hayden to feel connected, the family needed to move to another community.

"After talking and realizing that our kids were the only African-American people anywhere – at the grocery store, at school, in the community, at sporting events – we were like this has to change. So we moved."

They settled in a predominantly African-American community with a large population of Arab-Americans as well, which essentially flipped them into the position that their kids were in.

"My husband and I are now the minority," Jessica says. "So it's different to go out and to be different, to be the minority and to see how that feels.

"It's happened a handful of times

that we've been out and we've run into a family who are black with white children or white families with black children," says Jessica. "And then my kids stop and stare, and the kids are all looking at each other in awe. It's like, 'Hey, you look like me. Your family is different.'

"Having that connection is great. One night we were out to dinner and a family sat right next to us, and it was two black boys and two white parents. And my kids and their kids couldn't stop staring at each other.

"We just went to parent/teacher conferences and a little child came up to my son and said, 'where's your mom?' My son said, 'she's right there,' and the other kid looked at me and went, 'You're ...' and Hayden goes, 'I know; she's white.'

"I do worry what it's going to look

like when they get older. Are they going to have insecurities? Are they going to be embarrassed?

"I think it's been a real eye-opener that race does exist, and it does matter. Because I was naively thinking, 'Yeah, it's going to be fine.' I didn't think much about it at first, but it is extremely important and especially in today's society with so much racial tension and things happening. We have to talk about it, and we have to take action to be inclusive."

And as unsettling as a move can be, it proved to be the best choice for the entire Franks family.

"I'm so happy we made the decision for our kids because the first thing that Nevaeh said to me after coming home from her new school was, 'There are all these kids who look like me and have their hair in braids!'"



## Important considerations for adoptive parents

Adoptive families thinking about transracial adoption have many considerations, so MARE Adoption Navigator Jessica Franks offers these tips, which can also apply to same-race adoptions.

- First would be understanding that race and culture do matter – especially to children who have

already lost so much entering the foster care system. It is important to maintain a connection to their culture.

- Take trainings, read books, challenge your own thoughts and beliefs.
- Is your family accepting? Are you

willing to not invite that family member over if they're not supportive?

- Do you live in a diverse area? Are you willing to drive to the next county if it is more diverse?

I would encourage families to consider how much they're willing

to change their routine. Are you willing to go to a different church? Would you drive to a more diverse area to have your kids play sports there?

I'd also encourage putting books, materials and things like that in the home. We go to the library and check out books on adoption. They have age-appropriate books about adoption and culture. There was one about bears – a black bear, a brown bear, a white bear.

Find a community that will support and share in your unique experience while offering a safe

space without judgment. Attending support groups is a great way to feel understood or to meet other people going through similar experiences who can offer ideas and resources.

Create an ongoing, open and honest conversation about race, culture and identity in the home so youth feel comfortable talking. Be open to challenging conversations happening in the world's news or media and find fun ways to explore race and culture such as music and movies.

The holidays are a wonderful

time to learn more about your child's culture; consider cooking traditional meals, reading books, watching movies, or attending festivals or events. It is also a great opportunity to create your own new traditions together as a family.

We create our own traditions about how we celebrate and what the holiday means to us, so when Black History Month comes around, I'll have them teach me about Rosa Parks. Hayden is into Black Panther, so we support how important it is to have a black superhero.



## MARE Recruitment Consent Page

(Formerly called Confirmation of Conversation, Youth Adoption Recruitment Booklet)

This form must be completed by youths age 9 and up who are being featured for adoption recruitment. Per ADM 710, this form must be updated on MARE at least annually while the youth remains photolisted.

## In the works – a new and improved recruitment consent form for youth

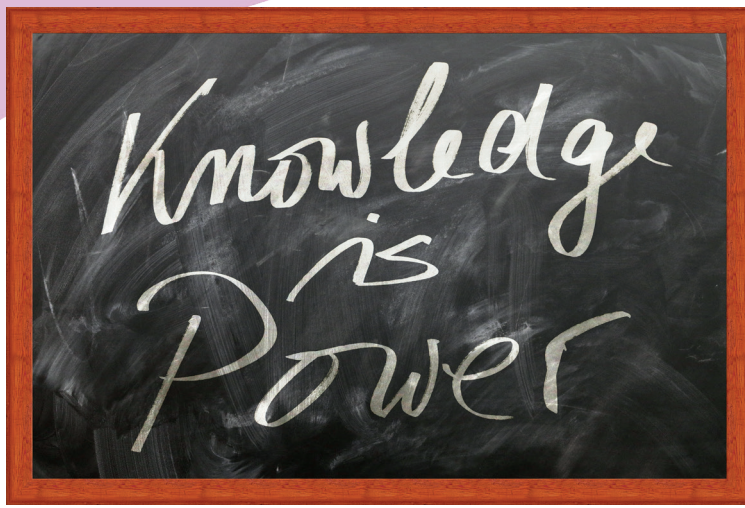
MARE is working on revising the recruitment consent form for youth to make it easier for them and workers to understand and use.

Also known as the Confirmation of Conversation and Youth Adoption Recruitment Booklet, the form lets youth choose which recruitment activities, if any, they want to participate in. The new form clarifies the activities and provides examples of how certain ones – such as newsletters, videos and the Heart Gallery – will be shared.

We believe workers will like an addition to the form where they can indicate they completed the form for a youth. Another box shows when workers complete the form on behalf of youth with disabilities.

If you have any questions about or suggestions for the recruitment consent form, contact Margaret White, [Margaret\\_White@judsoncenter.org](mailto:Margaret_White@judsoncenter.org), 734-528-1722 or Mark Fisk, [Mark\\_Fisk@judsoncenter.org](mailto:Mark_Fisk@judsoncenter.org), 734-646-7015.





## Our FAQ page provides valuable information

The Frequently Asked Question page on Mare.org offers plenty of resources for families on your caseload.

There are links and answers to questions such as Do I have to be married to adopt or be a foster parent? What kinds of children are waiting for adoption. Do I have to own my own home? Do I need to make a lot of money? Why are so many children available for adoption from foster care older? Are there any younger children available for adoption? Can I adopt just one child in a sibling group?

One of the best resources is a link to another page, Adoptive Parenting

Articles, where your families will find helpful information about parenting adoptive teens and parenting children who've experienced abuse or neglect.

It never hurts for parents to gain knowledge about adoption from several resources, so guide them to Mare.org > For Families > Frequently Asked Questions.

While they're in the For Families section, they can browse the View Waiting Children page to see the youth photolisted on our website or they can click on the Family Registry section and learn how to enhance their search for an adopted child.



## Changes coming to Mare.org

The MARE website is under construction! We are working on updating our website to make it easier to use. You can still use the site and access everything that you need to while we work on this, but be on the lookout for these exciting changes!

## Calendar

**February 18**  
**Virtual MARE**  
**Meet & Greet**  
10:30 a.m.-1 p.m.

**March 25**  
**In-Person MARE**  
**Meet & Greet**  
Novi  
10:30 a.m.-2 p.m.

**April 29**  
**In-Person MARE**  
**Meet & Greet**  
Bloomfield  
10:30 a.m.-2 p.m.

**May 20**  
**In-Person MARE**  
**Meet & Greet**  
Gaylord  
10:30 a.m.-2 p.m.

For more information, contact [jessica\\_thompson@judsoncenter.org](mailto:jessica_thompson@judsoncenter.org) or call 734-528-2070.

**Take note:** Watch for notices of upcoming Meet & Greets on [www.mare.org](http://www.mare.org) and on Facebook and Twitter.

## MARE contact information

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