



Professional Newsletter



Adoptive parents Lauren Macuga and Nate Martin.

Lessons in preparing to adopt a youth from foster care

Lauren Macuga and Nate Martin were already a happily married couple who had welcomed three sheltered dogs, two sheltered cats and a horse who needed TLC into their lives before they took the plunge into the process of adoption from foster care.

Make no mistake that the decision to adopt was a deep dive because as Lauren says, "We kind of dipped our toes in and then held back a little bit, but there's no trial period. Once you're in it, you're in it to win it."

Which, as Lauren explains, means diving into the process and seeing it through to the finish line. Lauren hopes other adoptive parents learn from how she and Nate persevered

along the way as well as how they sought and received plenty of assistance from MARE and others to what they anticipate as a happy ending.

Calling on a MARE adoption navigator's know-how

Lauren admits that there have been plenty of "oh gosh" moments and questioning whether they made the right decision. But now, she and Nate await the adoption finalization of a nine-year-old boy who was living in foster care and listed on Mare.org before being matched with them and moving into their home.

Of all the suggestions she has for

Winter 2024

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On the horizon

April 4

Virtual Waiting Family Forum, Teen Spotlight

The process of waiting to be matched with a child can be exciting, confusing and frustrating at times. To assist you through this process, the MARE Adoption Navigators are hosting a Waiting Family Forum. The Waiting Family Forum is 5:30-7 p.m., followed by a Teen Spotlight at 7-8:30. Watch the MARE website and Facebook page for additional details.

prospective adoptive parents, one stands out.

"Having an adoption navigator is big for the whole process," says Lauren, who worked with MARE Adoption Navigator Jessica Franks, an adoptive parent herself. "She followed us the whole way. She was very supportive and talked me through situations, and it was awesome that she's been through this whole process herself because she knew it like the back of her hand."

The power of patience, persistence and perseverance

Like other adoptive parents, Lauren and Nate slogged through the early stages of the adoption process. Once their home study got approved, they inquired about some of the youth listed on Mare.org who seemed to be a good fit. Then the wait began.

Lauren admits that it was frustrating when they didn't hear back on kids they had inquired on.

And not hearing back on inquiries is one of the biggest frustrations for prospective adoptive parents, yet one of the most important ways a MARE adoption navigator can support families.

"For many families, it takes time to get matched with a child because there are so many other families trying to be matched," says Jessica. "It takes time, it takes perseverance, it might even take doing additional things like attending trainings, seeking respite care or gaining fostering experience."

Lauren has another suggestion for adoptive parents.

"It's really important to be honest



The Macuga/Martin family.

with yourself about what types of behaviors and other issues you're willing to work with – and be supportive of – in that child's life. That was something we were trying to be really honest with ourselves. Go through and read about the (child function levels on the MARE website) and make sure the child fits within your criteria."

Jessica offers one more piece of advice.

"I just want families to know to stay persistent, and you'll find the supports to help you," says Jessica. "MARE has a lot of those programs if families want additional support. All of MARE is here to help, not just navigators."

"Aside from the MARE staff," adds Lauren, "there's an adoptive and foster parents' group from Michigan on Facebook (see more information on page 3). It's really great to be able to post questions in there, and the people responding are the people who really understand the process."

Welcoming a youth into the home

For Lauren and Nate, it's been a

long process to get approved to adopt and to get matched with a youth. But the family's preparation didn't stop with getting matched.

"Once they got matched, she asked me for resources," says Jessica, "so I sent her things I did at my home to help her transition him into their home."

Lauren mirrored Jessica's example and started getting ready to help her adoptive son feel more welcome.

"We got a picture of him turned into a magnet and had it on a refrigerator for the first day he came to visit, just so he felt like he was a part of the family already," says Lauren "Prior to having him over for the first time, I had made sure to send his foster mom lots of pictures of our home and our animals so he knew what to expect a bit."

She also took an extra step to help her adoptive son in the future.

"I actually have a copy of his MARE listing somewhere," says Lauren, who printed it because she knew MARE takes down the profiles of youth matched with families. "That

way as he gets older, we can talk about our process with him and be able to show him what (MARE) said about him that we liked."

Taking the dive into adoption

As she and Nate look forward to the approaching adoption

finalization of their adoptive son, which they believe will happen this spring, Lauren reflects on the process that got them this far with the goal that sharing helps other adoptive families.

"I really appreciate having a support system," Lauren says. "Most of the workers we've been paired with for fostering and

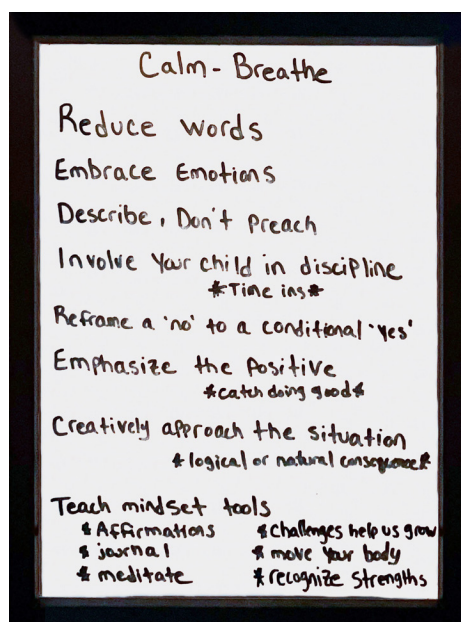
adoption have been amazing and have really gone out of their way to help us understand and help smooth out the process.

"One of the biggest things is don't be scared; just dive in, and it'll all work out. I was really scared, but you just make the decision and every day it's better and better and better."

Tips for families from two adoptive moms

One of the suggested resources that MARE Adoption Navigator and adoptive parent Jessica Franks recommends for adoptive families is the use of the REDIRECT acronym and the idea sheet she received from Lauren Peabody, founder of The Nurture Family Center in Fenton.

Jessica has the message framed and hung in her home to help her stay calm and redirect her adopted daughter and son so they stay calm as well. As Jessica says, "When you see a youth start to spiral, then you should use REDIRECT." Here's the meaning of the acronym along with Jessica's thoughts on each of the ideas.



Reduce our words (I tend to lecture so this is a nice reminder for me)

Embrace emotions (I understand you are sad/mad/angry/upset)

Describe (I see that you are yelling because you are upset that you can't watch TV right now)

Involve your child in discipline ("Time in," for instance, would be something like them sitting with you while you are working, helping you cook or helping with yard work. Time in is about spending more time together)

Reframe a "conditional no" to a yes (We can't go to the park today, but we can on Sunday, or you can't have candy right now, but you can after dinner)

Emphasize the positive (Catch kids doing good things, "I love how you put your toys away without me asking")

Creatively approach the situation (Use natural or logical consequences – <https://www.allanarobinson.com/nlcintro/>)

Teach mindset tools – (Instead of fretting about making a mistake, have them think about how it helps them learn; instead of "I give up," "let me try another way")

Adoptive parent Lauren Macuga offers other parents two of her biggest sources of support.

The first suggested support is the foster closets scattered throughout the state.

"They've helped us with clothing and other things we need," Lauren says. "They can help on birthdays, Easter, Christmas. They can get you extra support to go to fun places.

"Some do events, but they all do clothing of some sort. Last night, we went to Disney On Ice and one of the foster closets sponsored the event, so we got the tickets for free. They just do a lot of things to help out the families as well as the kids."

A list of foster closets by county can be found at <https://macombfostercloset.org/closets-statewide>

Lauren also praises the Adoptive Family Support Network (AFSN) Facebook page (www.facebook.com/AdoptiveFamilySupportNetwork/) and recommends it for other adoptive parents.

"It's a very welcoming group and a great place to vent, relate and get advice," she says. "They also post trainings and events."

Recruitment Corner



Adoption Permanency Specialist Jacqueline Berka shares tips for family/resource finding.

Look at all possibilities when recruiting families for youth

When working with an unmatched youth, it is important to explore their existing supports and connections for potential permanency options.

Think about everyone your youth has contact with on a somewhat regular basis. If appropriate, talk with your youth about this! What adults do they interact with (teachers, friends' families, coaches, etc.)? What friends or family members do they tell stories about?

Any adult who knows your youth can

and should be explored as a potential adoptive resource, if appropriate. The people who already know and love your youth can be some of the most valuable options for permanency.

Even if they are not able to take placement or adopt, they may be great sources of information about your youth and other adults in their life that could be permanency options. Don't leave these prospects unexplored!

Still time to register youth for Heart Gallery photos

Even though youth registration for the 2024 Michigan Heart Gallery has closed, workers can still register a youth by contacting Recruitment Specialist Jessica Thompson directly at Jessica_Thompson@judsoncenter.org or call 734-528-2070.

Workers will be notified when a youth is waitlisted and will be contacted if the youth is able to be moved off the waitlist and matched with a photographer.



Calendar

March 17

MARE In-Person Meet & Greet
Flint

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

April 27

MARE In-Person Meet & Greet
Bloomfield Township

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

June 22

MARE In-Person Meet & Greet
Holland

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

For more information, contact jessica_thompson@judsoncenter.org or call 734-528-2070.

Take note: Watch for notices of upcoming Meet & Greets on www.mare.org and on Facebook and Instagram.

MARE contact information

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