



Foster Care & Adoption News

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Meet the Williams Family

Kelly and Jared Williams always knew they wanted to expand their family through adoption. After the birth of their bio children, they began researching adoption and found Children's Bureau. Today, this Orange County family of seven is full of love for one another and they actively promote adoption in their community. We asked Kelly to share with us their inspiring story.

CB: What prompted you and your husband to adopt?

Jared and I decided to adopt at a very young age. We met when I was 18 years old and he was 20. We got married in our early twenties and always talked about how we wanted to give back to our community. We both adore children and knew that we wanted birth children and we wanted to help other children in anyway we could. It's so difficult to see how many children are in the foster care system. We wish we could adopt them all!

CB: Tell me about the children you have adopted.



We adopted Mara nine years ago when she had just turned three years old. She is African American and a beauty! She has the biggest heart you can imagine. When Mara moved in with us, she was severely speech delayed and had been severely neglected. I am proud to say that after a year of speech therapy and family support, Mara graduated from the class. She is now a beautiful 12-year-old young lady who loves to take dance classes and cheers through Pop Warner Football. Mara does well in school and has many great friends. She is the light of our lives.



Davion and Shawn are biological brothers who share the same birth mom. They are also African American and absolutely precious! They are sweet, caring, giving and athletic young boys. They lived in seven different foster homes prior to meeting us. What a blessing they have been. We adore these boys and believe the feeling is mutual. Shawn is 10 years old now and loves to play football, baseball, and basketball. He is a funny little boy. Davion is now 14 years old and very handsome. He is a quiet young man whom would do anything for anyone. He has such a caring heart. He loves to play football and dreams to one day do so for Florida State.

CB: Seems like your bio children were a part of the process. Share their motivation in having additional children join the family.

Our bio children, Drew and Jordan, grew up knowing that we wanted to adopt some day. After Jared finished medical school, we started to research how people go about adopting. We soon found out about Children's Bureau and immediately



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CELEBRATE NATIONAL ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH!

The nation will celebrate National Adoption Awareness Month in November! On Saturday, November 22nd the Edmund D. Edelman's Children's Court in Monterey Park will host a special day that includes the adoption of over 120 foster children in a festive courtroom filled with balloons, teddy bears, crafts and other activities for families. This is not only a happy time for the families but also for the social workers, attorneys and judges who work hard year-round to find safe, permanent homes for children in need. Congratulations to all of the families who will finalize their adoptions on this wonderful and emotional day!

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started the process. Once we started our foster-adopt classes, we couldn't wait to meet our soon-to-be little girl. Drew and Jordan were just as excited. They both share our philosophy of giving and understand that's what life is all about. If it weren't for the both of them being such loving, wonderful boys, we never could have done it. Drew and Jordan both say that someday they want birth children and they also will adopt children. They do not understand why more people do not adopt as Mara, Davion and Shawn have been such a blessing in our lives. None of us could imagine our lives without them.

How did you find Children's Bureau and tell us about your experience.

We did not know where to begin, so I started researching adoption agencies. I found Children's Bureau online. From the very first phone call with them, I knew they were going to be an amazing agency.

Children's Bureau has the most wonderful staff! They taught us so much about the process and what it takes to be a foster-adopt family. They did not sugar coat anything. I loved their honesty throughout the entire process. What really impressed us was how determined they were to find a child that would fit in with our family. Children's Bureau was determined to match the children to their strengths.



How has becoming an adoptive parent changed your lives?

Becoming adoptive parents has changed our lives for the better. When you give your heart and soul to a child and you look into their eyes and see the gratitude, it makes all those busy days seem worth it. All these children want is a loving home to call their own and they deserve it. Mara, Davion and Shawn are such sweet children. Adopting children has made us feel so much gratitude toward our family and friends. We could not have done it without all of their support. All of our friends and extended family embrace Mara, Davion and Shawn and love them so very much. It is amazing to see all five of our children laughing and having a great time together. We certainly are a colorful family and we love it!

Any final thoughts about adoption?

Our goal behind adopting was to give children a loving home and a family. We also hope that sharing our story opens the eyes of others around us. We have spread the word about foster-adopting to many people in our community and know several families who have adopted after speaking with us. It feels fantastic to help these children thrive and give back to our community through adoption.

They're All Worth It By Rev. Sarah Phelps, the Rector of St. Francis Episcopal Church in Palos Verdes, CA

At the end of March this year, my husband and I got the call we'd been waiting for.

We threw the diaper bag in the car and headed for the hospital. An hour later, a nurse in the NICU placed a little seven pound miracle in our arms and said, "He's all yours." We knew that wasn't exactly true, but we grinned and got teary-eyed nonetheless, and then sat down to eagerly receive the "first-time parent" instructions about how much to feed him and how to care for the umbilical cord.

We got back in the car with our foster child now safely ensconced in his car seat and happily started out on the most exciting, exhausting, wonderful, and painful experience of our lives.

My husband and I are not heroes. We did not seek to become foster parents out of a Christ-like desire to serve. Like many modern couples, we married in our early-to-mid 30s. We moved a couple of times, then my husband started a non-profit organization and I changed jobs, coming to St. Francis Episcopal Church in Palos Verdes in 2006. We wanted to wait until all these big changes were out of the way before we started a family. But we discovered that, for us, starting a family would not be so easy.

We explored various options from infertility treatment to private adoption. Then we discovered the Children's Bureau of Southern California and attended their orientation session for the foster/adoption program of Los Angeles County. That is when we began to learn about the 30,000 children who are being raised in foster care at any given time in LA County and the tragic situations they come from. We met adults who had been raised in foster care from the age of five but were never adopted, and how devastating that was for them. We heard a 19 year-old young woman say she'd still love to be adopted, just to have a family she could always "come home to."

My husband and I sought out the foster/adopt system in pursuit of our own happiness. After more than three years of waiting and hoping, we wanted to become parents as quickly as possible so we could finally experience the joy of raising a daughter or son. We went to the orientation at the Children's Bureau to determine whether the foster/adopt program was a good choice for us; but the more we learned, the more we found our circle of concern expanding. Suddenly it wasn't just about us anymore. I turned to my husband and quoted the words of Frederick Buechner: "The place [to which] God calls you... is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." He nodded, and by the end of the day we were committed.

Throughout our training, we were reminded that this process is not for the faint of heart. The situations from which foster children come will wrench your heart, and yet as foster/adopt parents you have to remember, even as you fall in love with your foster child,



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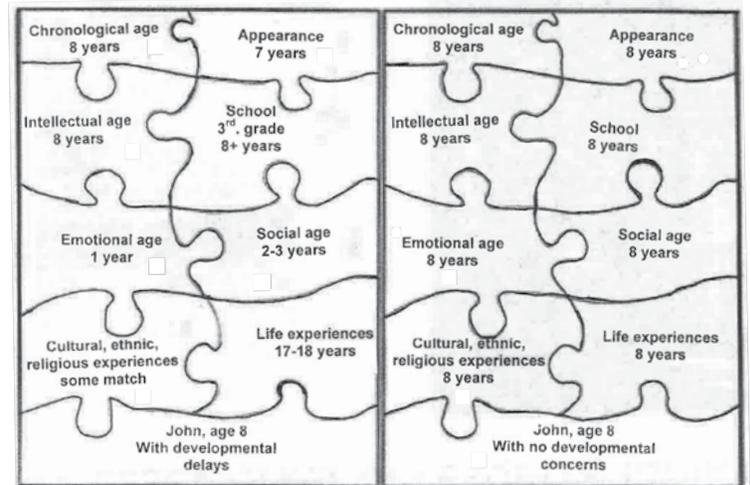
Children can be Challenging – Like a Jigsaw Puzzle?

The PRIDE (Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education) Model of Practice that we use at Children's Bureau to develop and support our foster and adoptive or resource parents as team members in child protection has many "tools." One tool to help us better understand children who have experienced trauma from abuse, neglect, or even prenatal drug use by birth parents, is to realize that this trauma can affect children's growth and development. This means that all parts of the child – from their appearance, to their social skills, and to all parts of their behavior can be impacted. The children then become like "jigsaw puzzle" pieces that we have to identify, so our expectations are realistic. Here's an example:

John is eight years old. But he may appear to be the size of a seven year old. Sometimes he behaves like a three year old. Educationally, because he may have moved a lot, he may be way behind in school. Because of abuse or neglect, he may naturally not trust adults. And since trust is established in the first year of life, John may behave emotionally as a young child, even a toddler with temper tantrums. Because of what he may have seen in his young life – maybe family violence, or drugs, or even sexual abuse, his life experience is closer to that of a 17-18 year old. And remember that his cultural, ethnic, and religious experience may be different as well. Don't forget gender and gender identity. John is a little boy....but some children when they become adolescents realize that they are more comfortable as another gender or sexual orientation.

So how do we – as resource parents and social workers – use teamwork to help John with all those jigsaw puzzle pieces? John needs a stable, predictable, family where breakfast, lunch and dinner always occur at approximately the same time each day. He needs to learn to trust his family and the adults who are working together for him. This includes first and foremost, the teamwork between his foster or resource parents and that you

Developmental, Strengths/Needs Assessment "Jigsaw Puzzle"



are working together with his DCFS worker and that all of you are working together to help his birth parents if reunification is the plan. In fact, the best way to help John is to remember your PRIDE competencies, which begin with protecting and nurturing, then meeting those developmental needs and addressing delays, supporting relationships with birth parents, connecting children to safe and nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime, and working as a member of a professional team.

Please know how important your family is to children whose earlier life experiences have created some "jigsaw puzzle" pieces. And like a puzzle, we need skill and patience. Please be sure to talk with your CB social worker about your child's jigsaw puzzle pieces - teamwork is always a good way to solve a puzzle. What are other ways you might solve the puzzle?

Adapted from: Pasztor, E.M. "The Jigsaw Puzzle Child" in Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE, PRIDE Model of Practice. Washington, DC - CWLA, Session 3.

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that the nurturing home you are providing him is the option of last resort. It is always the state's first priority to reunify a child with his or her birth parent or extended family if it is safe to do so; and it is only when that proves impossible that a child may be "freed" for adoption by a foster parent or someone else.

We have had our heart broken by this foster/adopt system. We have spent the last six months watching a smiley, happy, enthusiastic, sweet-natured boy emerge from the warm, sleepy little cocoon of flesh that was placed in our arms back in March. We have loved him more than we knew it was possible to love; and yet, sometime this month we will have to let him go. He is one of the fortunate ones with a loving extended family who has stepped forward to raise him.

We will miss him terribly. And, of course, we are disappointed that we will be waiting yet again. But that little boy is worth it. They're all worth it.

Breaking News About Training Programs

Children's Bureau has added two training programs to accommodate local residents in the Antelope Valley and the South Bay. Children's Bureau Antelope Valley is on its second pre-service PRIDE training cycle. The trainings have been held on Thursday nights by Bernadette Boylan, Supervisor and PRIDE Trainer. The Carson office is planning a pre-service training cycle to begin in January 2015 with Cynthia Elliott, Adoption Matching Coordinator and PRIDE Trainer, on pre-determined Saturdays.

If you live in these areas or have friends who do, please help us get the word out. And of course, trainings are still being offered in Los Angeles at Magnolia Family Place. As always, we appreciate the support and thank the Foster and Foster-Adopt parents who have already referred new families.

The PRIDE Model of Practice Strength-Based Words and Expressions

By Cathy Allan, Program Coordinator

The PRIDE Model of Practice is the program that Children's Bureau is using to develop and support our foster and adoptive (resource) parents as team member in child protection. A model of practice means we share a common vision, mission, goals and best practices; we use strength-based words and expressions. Please join us in using this new language.

For example:

INSTEAD OF SAYING	WE SAY	BECAUSE
Case	Child	Cases don't have children
Home	Family	Children are healed by families not homes
Home study	Family Assessment	Children are healed by families not homes
Home Study Worker	Family Development Specialist	CB develops families to care for children
Remove	Separate	Garbage is removed
Placed	Join	Children are not objects
Up for adoption	Ready for Adoption	Children no longer stand on platforms for people to view
Hard to place child	Safe and nurturing families are hard to find	There is a family for every child
Concern or Problem	Consideration or Need	All of us have needs that can be met

One more expression to remember is our mantra: *Minimize Trauma: Maximize Teamwork!*

Our strength-based words and expressions come from the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) and the *Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE* pre-service training program for prospective resource parents.

Helpful Materials Available for Parents

New parents might not be aware of the extensive library of materials that are available to them in our Los Angeles, Palmdale, Carson and Baldwin Park offices. For several years, Children's Bureau's Adoption Promotion and Support Services Program has been reviewing and ordering materials that address issues that are common among adopted children and their parents as well as general parenting issues.

Children's Bureau's social workers can help you to determine what issues you would like to review through books, videos or even books on tapes. Parents might also be interested in knowing that using our resource library counts for training hours. Please ask your social worker for details. These resources can offer invaluable insight and knowledge in how to raise successful, happy children.

Tips for Parents of Babies

It is never too early to read to a baby. As soon as a baby is born, he or she begins to learn. Just by talking to, playing with and caring for the baby every day, you help him/her develop language skills necessary to become a reader. By reading with a baby, you foster a love of books and reading. Below are some tips of fun ways to help a child become a happy and confident reader:

Snuggle up with a book. When you hold a baby close and look at a book together, the baby will enjoy the snuggling and hearing your voice as well as the story. Feeling safe and secure with you builds the baby's confidence and love of reading.

Choose baby-friendly books. Books with bright and bold or high-contrast illustrations are easier for young babies to see, and will grab their attention. Books made of cloth or soft plastic (for the bathtub) or board books with sturdy cardboard pages are easier for a baby to handle.

Keep books where baby can reach them. Make sure some books are easy to reach, hold and look at as toys. Babies put everything in their mouth so only put chewable books within reach.

Talk with baby – all day long. Describe the weather or which apples you are choosing at the grocery store. Talk about the pictures in a book or things you see on a walk. Ask questions. By listening, a child learns words, ideas and how language works.

Encourage the baby's coos, growls and gurgles. They are a baby's way of communicating with you and are important first steps toward speech. Encourage attempts to mimic you. The more the baby practices the clearer they will become.

Give baby a hand! Encourage baby to pick up crackers or peas, touch noses and toes, point to pictures and grab toys. The muscles in those little hands will grow strong, agile and ready to turn pages.

Develop a daily routine and make reading a part of it. Routines can soothe a baby and let a baby learn to predict what will happen next. The ability to predict is important when a child is older and is reading independently.

Sing, Read, Repeat. Read favorite songs over and over again. Repeated fun with books will strengthen language development and positive feelings about reading.

"Read" your baby. Pay attention to how baby reacts to the book you are reading. Stop if the baby is not enjoying the book or the story and try another book or another time.

**Condensed and paraphrased from Readingrockets.org, "Tips for Parents of Babies"*

Independent Domestic Adoption Assessments Now Available

Children's Bureau now offers the service of completing independent domestic family assessments (adoption home studies) for families adopting outside of Children's Bureau. For more information or to refer a family, please contact Cindy Stogel at (213) 342-0117.



Interested in learning more about Children's Bureau's foster care, adoptions or mentoring programs?
Please give us a call at (800) 730-3933 or (661) 272-9996 or visit us at www.all4kids.org.