



# Foster Care & Adoption News

## Meet the Holling Family

### **CB: How did you find Children's Bureau and why did you choose to foster/adopt through this agency?**

*We originally signed up to foster/adopt directly through LA County, however, we were watching a gay couple on the TV show "Adoption Stories" that mentioned Children's Bureau. Right away, I googled Children's Bureau and got their number. I left a voicemail and received a call back in less than an hour. We were sold!*

### **CB: Tell me about your experience with Children's Bureau. How has the organization helped you on this journey?**

*Our experience with Children's Bureau has been nothing but positive. They have helped us every step of the way in our many foster placements. The social workers are never too busy to help. We were always treated with respect. No question ever went unanswered.*

### **CB: What inspired you to become foster parents and how has it changed your life?**

*We have both always wanted large families. Charles is from a large family, so he knows what it is like. Michael is from a small family, but always wanted a large family. We looked at many avenues of adoption and decided that the foster care system was the way to go. There are so many kids in the foster care system that need stable, loving homes. We realized that we could fulfill our dream of having a family and also fulfill a child's dream of being a part of a family. The process has changed our lives dramatically. There have been the exciting times of placement, and the heartbreak when they leave. Even with the heartbreak, this has been an experience that we never regret.*

### **CB: What are some of the challenges you've faced raising a child as a gay couple? How have you overcome those challenges?**

*Before we had kids, we were worried about how society would judge us. Would we have to shield and protect our children while*

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## Our Adoption Story

### **CB: How did you find Children's Bureau and why did you choose to foster/adopt through this agency?**

*When we decided to expand our family we knew we would need help making that happen. After exploring the various options, the only path that felt right for us was Foster to Adopt. We also wanted an agency that would be open to working with a gay couple and that would support us on the journey. After lots of research, we narrowed the options down to just a few agencies. Then an acquaintance referred us to Children's Bureau. She had such positive things to say that we added Children's Bureau to the list. After our first information session at another agency, I almost called the whole thing off. The process seemed cold and institutional. The next weekend, we had an information session at Children's Bureau's Magnolia Place. What a stark contrast! Even the building was bright, welcoming and happy. We were greeted warmly by Children's Bureau staff and there were two other gay couples in our info session. Maria, who led the session, was very open, optimistic and warm. She talked about the community at Children's Bureau and how they support families through their journey. During that meeting, two different couples unexpectedly stopped in to visit and show off the child that had joined their family the day before. If one of the first things you want to do as a new parent is share that joy with your agency, then they must be a true part of your community like friends and family. We knew then that we wanted to be a part of the Children's Bureau community.*



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### **CB: Tell me about your experience with Children's Bureau. How has the organization helped you on this journey?**

*We started PRIDE training a month after our info session. Cindy Stogel, Foster Care and Adoption Coordinator, taught our class. Six years later, I consider Cindy a friend and can say that we tap into what she taught us daily. We made friends and connections at Children's Bureau that have helped us through both the most rewarding and hardest times. If I can give any advice, it's absorb as much information in training as possible and work closely with the Children's Bureau team. It really makes a difference. The friends you make in the foster/adopt community will understand your journey like no one else can.*

*Like typical type-A personalities, we were very focused and driven to be parents. We completed training and certification very quickly--just under two months. Three days later, a one-year-old boy joined our family. We taught him his name, to babble, his first word ("Yay!") and to have an opinion. County social workers told us we'd be able to adopt him and we let that seed of hope grow in our hearts. He was with us for two and a half months before very suddenly reunifying with his family. It was devastating. We weren't sure how we would get through the pain. We reached out to Children's Bureau and they connected us with families who had experienced losing a child to reunification. We really wanted someone to tell us exactly what to do to make the pain go away but obviously that's not possible. There are no short cuts in managing grief. However, it did help to talk to other people who had healed and tried again. We realized we needed to give ourselves time to get through it. And we did. Lots of tears and a few months later, we put our names back on the list.*

*One day I received a call about an 18-month-old healthy happy boy. I said yes before even talking to Dawn. A few days later, Tyrek joined our family on Halloween. Best treat EVER! Children's Bureau and its community helped all along our journey. We made friends and learned about additional resources in the monthly support groups. What we learned helped us advocate for Tyrek in a complex system. We fostered Tyrek for 13 months before finalizing his adoption. It was one of the best days of my life.*

*Even after finalizing our adoption, we stayed in contact with the Children's Bureau team. Fostering another child isn't something we can do right now but we really wanted to do more. We wanted to give back and help more families and children. We knew we could help by sharing our story and encouraging other families which would ultimately help more children than we could fit in our home. I started guest speaking at the information sessions and at agency awareness/recruitment events. Cindy asked us to join the Parent Panel that's part of the final day of PRIDE training. We were able to share our experience to help other families starting their foster/adopt journey. Eventually, Cindy asked me to co-facilitate the PRIDE training. I was honored that she valued my perspective and trusted me to initiate families into the CB community. The material can be heavy at times, especially when talking about grief and loss, but co-facilitating is a very rewarding experience.*

*Our son has experienced tremendous loss in his life. Goodbyes and transitions are very hard for him. We talk a lot about goodbyes in our home. Little goodbyes, Medium goodbyes and Big goodbyes. Little is mom going to work,*

*Medium is Grandpa who lives out of town but visits often, Big is when you don't get to see someone again. Last year, Tyrek transitioned to a new school after being at his old school for three years (half his life). It was a very big loss for him. Even though we kept contact with friends and former teachers, it hit Tyrek like a ton of bricks. He was really struggling and we knew we needed to get him help. We reached out to lots of friends and connections but were struggling to find resources experienced with the unique needs of foster kids. I emailed Cindy Stogel with the details of what was happening to see if she could refer anyone. We learned Children's Bureau could help! She connected us with the Adoption Promotion and Support Services (APSS) team at Children's Bureau. They helped us to quickly get the specific support we needed. We're still receiving APSS services. Have I said yet that we LOVE Children's Bureau? We do. Not only did they help us start our family but they are helping us keep it healthy.*



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### **CB: What inspired you to become foster parents and how has it changed your life?**

*We initially just wanted to be parents and Foster to Adopt was the only way we were comfortable growing our family. Private adoption or medical methods did not feel right to us. There are amazing kids out there who needed a family. Through training we learned more about the foster system and how many children are in foster care. It became something larger for us. We wanted to help as many kids as we could but neither of us wanted a huge family. We are big champions for foster care. I'm sure my friends and co-workers are going to tell me to shut up eventually.*

*The biggest change for us was simply becoming parents. Our lives are completely transformed. I will always consider our first foster my first son. He lives in my heart even if I can't nurture and watch him grow. When we lost him I wasn't sure my heart would heal. Instead, like the Grinch's, it grew three sizes and made us the moms we are today. Our son Tyrek is the "perfect" kid for us. He's everything we could ever have wanted plus more. He's a creative and imaginative high energy seven-year-old and doing a great job to entertain, challenge and keeps us on our toes every day. Nothing melts my heart more than when he tells me, "This was the best day ever," after a casual day of hanging out together.*

### **CB: What are some of the challenges you've faced raising a child as a gay couple? How have you overcome those challenges?**

*Tyrek has two moms but he really wants a dad, too. Family, friends and even mannies (male nannies) help to fill the gap but nothing takes the place of a dad when that's what you really want. Helping Tyrek with those feelings and making sure he has the role models he needs is going to be a lifelong challenge.*

One of our biggest frustrations was in getting Tyrek's birth certificate. He was born in Texas and his new birth certificate had to be issued by Texas. However, they had laws that prohibited listing two people of the same sex as parents on vital records. Even though he was legally adopted in California, they refused to issue a certificate with both of us on it. There were several legal cases in the courts to challenge the law so we decided to hang tight to see how they played out. Eventually, gay marriage became legal in the US. The Texas law was overturned, as well, but in the meantime Texas added red tape that made the process cumbersome. Our lawyer was ultimately able to crack the code and four years after finalizing Tyrek's adoption we received his birth certificate.

**CB: What should a gay or lesbian couple know going into the adoption process? What advice would you give new parents in a similar situation?**

We live in Los Angeles near West Hollywood where gay and lesbian families are common. That has made our journey more typical of any family going through the adoption process. At times, we were the only gay family at Tyrek's small pre-schools. It was up to us to carry the gay "torch" but also the adoption, foster and transracial family torches. We talked to the schools to make sure they included non-traditional family structures in their curriculum. It's essential that we work with all of Tyrek's teachers, doctors, and care takers to make sure they appropriately understand and support him. We keep our creative hats on all the time. When we couldn't find books with characters that represented our family, we bought people color markers and made modifications. We seek out places in our community where our son can interact with others like us and him. Community is very important. Ours has transformed immensely since we became parents.

**CB: Tell us about the child you adopted.**

Tyrek is fast. When we first got him, he had us chasing him down the street and through the park early in the morning. He loved the thrill of being chased. He still gets an adrenaline rush from it. If they made chase an Olympic sport, he'd win the gold.

Watching Tyrek's interests and skills develop over the years has been fascinating. Nature and nurture at work. Tyrek sings day and night. As a baby, he would hum the sing song of words before he could say them. My wife Dawn shares her love of musical theater with him. Their morning ride to school features show tunes from Hamilton to Annie.

Tyrek also loves hair. In preschool, Tyrek would touch the long hair of the girls in his class. Now he's braiding and styling it. The other day he pointed out a store front building and talked about the hair salon he'd have when he's big. He would cut and color, I would comb and Dawn would be the in-house chef. Nature at work again.

we were out in public? We have never had any challenges being a gay couple. I think that we have the same "normal" issues that straight couples have. Our 6 year old brags to his whole kindergarten class that he has two dads. Gay or straight, everyone has the same challenges as everyone else.

**CB: What should a gay or lesbian couple know going into the adoption process? What advice would you give new parent in a similar situation??**

We would like gay or lesbian couples to know that adoption IS possible. You can have the family that you have always wanted. The foster/adopt process is very much paperwork intensive, but once the paperwork is done and you hold your child for the first time, all the paperwork is forgotten. The best advice is that if you are considering foster/adopt, talk to people that have gone through the process. Talk to many people, as everyone's situation is different and you can get a better idea of the process. If you do not know anyone, call Children's Bureau to get more information. Educate yourself on the foster/adopt process, you may be surprised just how easy it really is.

**CB: Tell me about the child you adopted.**

Wow, this question could go on for days if we go too in depth. We have officially adopted a total of six children. We have three boys and three girls. Our youngest, Maddison, is 18 months and is the biological sister of our 3 year old girl, Emeli. We have had Maddison and Emeli since birth. Jaxon is 6 and was our first child we had placed with us. He has been with us from birth and we were actually able to pick him up from the nursery at the hospital. Jacob is 10 and Mia is seven. Jacob and Mia are biological brother and sister. They came to live with us almost three years ago. Carlos is our oldest, he is 20. Carlos has lived with us since he was 14. We decided on a teenager because he identified as gay and we felt we could be positive gay role models for him. We wanted him to grow up in a home where he could be himself. We have had eight additional children stay with us that ended up being reunited with their families. We were only planning on adopting five children, but we always decided that if one of their birth moms ever had another baby, we would take them in no matter what. Well, that's where Maddison came from. We are now, and forever will be, The Holling 8.



### Children's Bureau Partners With RaiseAChild

Children's Bureau partners with RaiseAChild which recruits, educates, and nurtures supportive relationships equally with all prospective foster and adoptive parents to improve the process of advancing foster children to safe, loving, and permanent homes. The RAC vision is to be the nationwide leader in the recruitment and support of LGBT and all prospective parents interested in building families through fostering and adopting to meet the needs of the over 425,000 children in the foster care system.

# Children's Bureau Launches *Be The Reason* Campaign to Encourage Community Members to Foster or Foster-Adopt Children in Need

In an effort to bring awareness to the need for community members to foster or foster-adopt children in need, Children's Bureau has launched a simple, yet compelling advertising campaign called *Be the Reason*. Four key messages can be seen on hundreds of digital and print billboards along with airport and shopping mall shelters throughout Southern California.

In Los Angeles County, the foster care population exceeds 21,000 children with 500 of those foster children waiting for an adoptive family. While Children's Bureau places more than 300 at-risk children in loving foster homes and finalizes 100 adoptions annually, the need continues for more individuals and/or families to become resource parents. Resource parents (foster and adoptive) are people who are concerned about the well-being of children and their families. Resource parents protect and nurture children, meet children's developmental needs, support children's relationships with their birth families and do all of this as a member of a professional team.

"Children's Bureau turns away at least 50 calls a day because we don't have enough resource families to meet the demanding need," said Amy Heilman, Children's Bureau's Director of Foster Care and Adoption. "We hope that this ad campaign inspires folks to see that they can be the reason a child feels loved, happy, safe, and thrives."

For 23 years, Children's Bureau has partnered with

several outdoor advertising companies that post the ads at no cost to Children's Bureau at an estimated in-kind value of more than \$1 million. This broad reach in the community could not be achieved by Children's Bureau on its own. This year, those partners include AdSpace Mall Networks, Clear Channel Outdoor, EYE, Intersection, JC Decaux, Lamar Advertising, Martin Outdoor, Outfront Media, Regency Outdoor, Starlite Media and Summit Media.

"Lamar Advertising is proud to partner with Children's Bureau in helping to spread their very important message throughout the community. If we can help Children's Bureau make even one connection that impacts the life of a child in need, the campaign was a great success," said Mike Cossota, Sales Manager, Lamar Advertising – Los Angeles.

Children's Bureau welcomes every individual regardless of race, age, religion, disability, marital status, ethnic background, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression to become a resource for children. Qualifying families receive training and support throughout their journey.



## Children's Skills Improve While in CB Families' Care

While in the care of our Children's Bureau Resource Parents, children experience significant cognitive, academic and developmental growth. During the 2015-16 period, for the older children (ages 5-18) in Wide Range Achievement Tests, scores improved in reading 10 percentile ranks overall, scores improved in spelling by 8 percentile ranks overall and scores improved in math by 8 percentile ranks overall.

For the younger children (ages 3 to 5 years) utilizing the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test, language scores related to listening, comprehension and verbal ability increased by 7 percentile ranks overall. Language scores related to verbal expression increased by 13 percentile ranks overall.

This magnitude of growth occurred over a very short period of time (typically six months). There are many factors that contributed to these strides in development - such as consistency and stability in family life and school, good nutrition, attention to health needs, small number of children placed in one family for maximum interaction, and good communication between the resource family and the school. Other factors include the benefits of the Needs and Services planning meetings which track needs/gains, create individualized interventions for foster/adoptive parents and coordinate services to assure progress. Resource parents also regularly pursue ongoing training in order to meet the developmental needs of children with special attention to health needs, checking on diet and sleep patterns, checking on vision and hearing tests, etc., which impacts the growth and progress of the child. Low social worker caseloads and consistency contribute to the overall environment that promotes progress.

What are the implications? The foster care experience can help children overcome delays in language and academic skills. Improving skills for children in foster care can have wide reaching ramifications for resilience, self-esteem, problem-solving, school achievement, and social competence. Findings emphasize the importance of a regular review of children's skills and development while they are in foster care with the results translated into practical interventions which are coordinated by the team to assure progress.

**Interested in learning more about Children's Bureau's foster care and foster-adoption programs?  
Please give us a call at (800) 730-3933 or (661) 272-9996, email us at  
RFrecruitment@all4kids.org, or visit us at <https://www.all4kids.org/program/foster-care/>**