



Foster Care & Adoption News

Spring 2013

Issue 18

Wayne & Traci's Adoption Story - It began at Starbucks

Wayne, Traci and their 7-year-old son, Tyler, made the decision to grow their family through adoption but were unsure how to begin the process. On a morning stop to Starbucks, Wayne noticed a Children's Bureau postcard on the community board promoting foster care and adoption. Wayne shared his inspired discovery with Traci, and, after doing some online research, they made a call to Children's Bureau for an application.

After completing 18 hours of training, a first aid/CPR class and family assessment, the couple was ready to add another child to their family. They already had a positive parenting experience with Tyler and felt even more confident after the training. Tyler was also ready and excited to be a big brother.

Wayne and Traci met with Children's Bureau Matching Coordinator Cynthia Elliott to discuss the foster children available and who might be a good fit for their family. Next the couple planned to meet a child, have a visit and transition the child into their home. However, that's not how this

journey continued. An emergency situation arose that involved siblings --- a 3-year-old girl and 4-year-old boy --- who needed a home immediately. They had been in a temporary shelter home and then a foster home for nine months.

Would they take them? "Yes, of course!" Wayne and Traci welcomed Sadie and Jacob into their home without hesitation. Their family of three happily turned into a family of five over night.

Wayne was able to leave work for two weeks to help Traci with their new reality. The first three weeks were overwhelming for the couple. Despite their successful parenting with Tyler, Jacob and Sadie presented new challenges including an empty emotional cup that needed filling. Sadie and Jacob craved constant attention and reassurance. They didn't have the ability to self-soothe. Jacob would cry for hours. The experience was heartbreaking and exhausting but Wayne and Traci continued to persevere. The children continued to ask for things even when not needed to get attention. They took awhile to cuddle and physically demonstrate affection. They were still afraid to say they didn't like a particular food or activity. Yet they immediately referred to Wayne and Traci as "Mommy



Finalization Day for Wayne and Traci (center) and kids along with both grandmothers.

Continued on page 3

SAVE THE DATE: Children's Bureau to Host Appreciation Luncheon for Certified Foster and Adoptive Parents on May 18th !

Children's Bureau will host its annual Foster and Adoptive Family Appreciation Luncheon and Training on Saturday, May 18th at our showcase facility, Children's Bureau Magnolia Family Place in Los Angeles. The day will include a continental breakfast, inspirational and educational speakers and luncheon - plus raffle prizes! Training credit will be given for six hours (9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.).

Foster and adoptive parents are expected to attend from all of the areas served by Children's Bureau including Los Angeles, Santa Clarita, Ontario, Antelope Valley, Lake Los Angeles, Anaheim, Thousand Oaks and Carson.

We look forward to spending time with the foster and adoptive parents who give so much of themselves to children in need. Our staff will be present to personally thank each of you for a job well done! You all are truly valued and cherished by Children's Bureau.

Reservations are required and can be placed by calling Helen Flores at (213) 342-0165. Children's Bureau at Magnolia Place Family Center is located at 1910 Magnolia Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90007.



Healing from Food Insecurity; Beyond the Stash

Excerpted and Summarized from the article by Katja Rowell, M.D. in *Adoptalk*, Winter 2013, North American Council on Adoptable Children

Whether a child is 15 days or 15 years old, feeding and nurturing through shared meals is a critical way to deepen attachment. Dr. Bruce Perry refers to ideal bonding opportunities as repetitive, relationship-building, pattern-based, and involving the senses- which describes the family meal experience perfectly.

Unfortunately, conflict around food and eating habits are more common for foster and adopted children due to their past experiences. When conflict defines interactions around food, those bonding opportunities are lost, and trust and attachment can suffer as well.

Parents want to raise children who are healthy and happy. Many try to instill healthy eating habits by enforcing nutrition rules or portion control. But when raising children who have experienced food insecurity, healing the anxiety around food is key to helping children grow up to be competent eaters who can self-regulate and learn to eat a variety of foods.

When children are not fed reliably, do not get enough food or have to compete for enough, they become anxious. When food-insecure children do not have access to food, they often don't understand or trust that it is coming again in adequate amounts. Food insecurity and supportive feeding deeply color the initial relationship a child has with food. It can take weeks, months and even years of reliable feeding for that trust to build for children to believe they will be fed. Some children who have been food insecure demonstrate hoarding behaviors. These survival strategies may manifest themselves in the following: eating quickly, gobbling or stuffing food, stealing or hiding food, eating large quantities even to the point of vomiting, becoming upset if someone eats off their plate, getting upset if food is limited or taken away, getting upset or eating faster if asked to slow down, eating only familiar and "safe" foods, keeping food in the mouth for hours.

Parents need to be absolutely reliable about providing regular food and depending on the child, allow them to have healthy snacks available. To facilitate bonding and food security, food should come from the parents whenever possible. When a child is hungry, it is an opportunity to nurture and deepen the attachment with the child. Feeding a child directly shows him that he will be taken care of and builds trust. Meeting his needs over and over again, is the basis for attachment.

Reassuring the child that there will always be food, by overstocking his favorite foods may be helpful. Being reliable about feeding is the best way to lessen hoarding behaviors and to lessen the anxiety around food. Deborah Gray, in *Attaching and Adoption*, wrote about "high nurture, high structure parenting." Parents provide regular meals and snacks with balanced and tasty foods, and the child decides how much to eat from what is provided.

Limiting a child's food intake may cause more anxiety and more prone to overeat. Research tells us that restrictive feeding tends to lead to higher weight and increased eating in the absence of hunger. Food restriction and efforts to control weight lead to more entrenched food obsession with food-seeking behaviors worsening, not improving.

It is critical to address a child's initial food anxiety with nurturing, reliable feeding and allow the child to "overeat" while she learns to trust her cues of hunger and fullness. With reliable, pleasant and satisfying meals and snacks, even the food-insecure child will learn over time that he doesn't have to worry about when or how much he will get to eat.

For more information on this topic, read *Love Me, Feed Me: The Adoptive Parent's Guide to Ending the Worry about Weight, Picky Eating, Power Struggles and More* by Katja Roswell, M.D.

Tips to Reduce Food Anxiety

- Feed young children every 2-3 hours and older children every 3-4 hours.
- Offer food more frequently at first.
- Show him the pantry, perhaps as a meal is ending, saying "There will always be enough food."
- Plan on pleasant family meals – battling over food does not help him feel more secure.
- Structure is critical; if you go to the park, take a balanced, filling snack.
- Include fat, protein and carbs. A snack might be whole wheat crackers with cream cheese and apple slices or cereal, milk and banana.
- At meals and snacks, he gets to eat as little or as much as he wants from what you provide. Even if he eats a lot initially, this sense of control will reassure him.
- Always provide at least one thing from her accepted list. She needs to feel that she can come to the table and her hunger will be fed.
- Invite the children to help you cook and meal-plan. Resist the urge to argue or pressure, even if he refuses food he chose.
- Let her know she can politely spit out food she doesn't want to swallow into a paper napkin. Children are more likely to try a new food if they can spit it out.
- Don't worry about enforcing manners right away. Lead by example.
- Serve foods family-style so a child can serve herself and feel more in control. This also diffuses power struggles that begin when a pre-served food is on her plate that she doesn't like or want.
- Parents get to worry or think about the food, so the child doesn't have to.

A WORD FROM LOU NIEMAN, DIRECTOR OF FOSTER CARE & ADOPTIONS: Family Foster Care and Adoption as Prevention Programs

Family foster care and adopting through foster care have traditionally been defined as intervention and treatment programs. However, the prevention aspects of these programs are seldom acknowledged or addressed. The following examples illustrate this important and often overlooked perspective in meeting the needs of at-risk children.



- When initial child abuse and neglect prevention efforts are unsuccessful with a birth family in a community, placing a child in a safe and nurturing temporary family foster home **prevents** further abuse and neglect.
- Family foster care also interrupts and then **prevents** the possibility of the generation-to-generation cycle of child abuse and neglect in a family from continuing.
- When a child feels safe and nurtured in a foster family, it **prevents** the child from needing to spend all of their energy worrying and frees them to develop to their true potential. Program evaluation has shown that children in Children's Bureau's foster care families make significant improvements in their developmental, academic and cognitive skills over periods as short as six months.
- When the family foster care program helps children reintegrate back into their birth families, the birth family has ideally learned new skills, thereby **preventing** future child abuse and neglect. Foster parents can be a positive resource and support for the child and their birth family during this process.
- If efforts at reintegration back into a child's birth family are unsuccessful, Children's Bureau provides foster families who are willing, able, and have the resources to adopt that child. This **prevents** children from otherwise languishing in the foster care system.
- Adoption **prevents** child abuse and neglect by providing a child with a permanent, safe and nurturing family intended to last a lifetime.
- When adoptions are open and birth family connections are valued and supported, it **prevents** a child from losing that valuable connection. Viewing the relationships with birth parents as positive and of value contributes to a positive self image for the child.
- While in foster care and during the adoption journey, securing mental health services when needed may **prevent** a child from behaviors that are not healthy and productive for them.
- Foster and adoptive parents are positive role models to a child and thus might **prevent** a child from repeating their birth family's challenges. They access proper medical and dental care, counseling and other support services needed to ensure the safety and well being of the child. They help a child achieve academic success, discover new activities and interests. They motivate, encourage, listen and provide unconditional love, despite setbacks or challenges. When a child experiences these elements of a nurturing, caring family life, it changes their view of the world as a dangerous and hurtful place to one of opportunity and possibilities.

An Adoption Story continued from page 1

and Daddy" as well as their new Grandma and Grandpa. Wayne and Traci talked with the children about their feelings and fears. They gave the children structure in how to handle their emotions. Limits and boundaries were gently but firmly established. Weeks of constant reassurance, routine and endless love finally paid off as the children became calmer and adjusted to their family.

Today, Sadie and Jacob are secure in expressing their feelings and needs. They don't mind telling you that they hate broccoli. They are able to self soothe and do not need constant interaction. Wayne and Traci feel that this piece was the most challenging for them and are now overjoyed to see their children's adjustment. Sadie and Jacob each have their own life book which contains their history and loving new family. The children have an age-appropriate understanding of adoption and comfortably talk about their life situation. Big brother Tyler takes pride in the accomplishments of his new siblings and loves to play with them.

*CB Social Worker
Betsy with newly
adopted Jacob and
Sadie.*



Wayne and Traci say that being a foster/adoptive parent takes a lot of patience and support. Children's Bureau Social Worker Betsy was always a phone call away to help them navigate the range of emotional needs of Sadie and Jacob. Jacob's baseball team has helped him to bond with other children and their parents. He easily interacts with others at school and church. Wayne's company is flexible with his schedule so he can help more at home. The family has found other parents who have adopted children and together they share their experiences. Wayne and Traci love their new family and look forward to what the future brings for each of their children!

Join Our Adoption Promotion and Support Services Program!

Children's Bureau's Adoption Promotion and Support Services program gives more than 250 resource (foster & adoptive) families each year additional help through case management, therapy, mentoring and support groups. If you are facing a challenge or want more support in your journey, we are here to help. Ask your current CSW for an APSS referral or after adoption finalization, contact Post Adoption Services unit. We also invite you to become mentors. Mentors help resource families with vital peer support, information and shared experiences as they go through the adoption process and afterwards. For more information, please call Laura Kriegisch at 310-463-5828 or Delmy Rivera at 626-607-8152. We would love to hear from you!

Referral Fee \$500 per Family

To further encourage you, our excellent foster and adoptive families, to refer quality families to become foster and adoptive parents, we have raised the referral fee to \$500! When a family attends an Information Meeting or turns in their application, ask them to write your name as the Referral Source --- it's that easy! When the family becomes certified, you will receive \$250 and when a child is placed with the family, you will receive an additional \$250! Referrals are our best resource for finding quality families, so please share our program with your family and friends. For more information, please contact your social worker.

Independent Domestic Adoption Studies Now Available

Children's Bureau now offers the service of completing independent domestic adoption 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.



Support Groups Offered

Children's Bureau provides support groups each month for families at both the Magnolia Family Place in Los Angeles and at the Antelope Valley office. These groups provide a great opportunity for you to meet, learn and share your experiences with other foster and adoptive families. Oftentimes parents in our support groups build lasting friendships outside of the group. Certified parents receive two training hours for attending a meeting. Check your calendar or ask your social worker for information on exact locations, dates and times.

Security for Children Short or Long-Term

Heather T. Forbes, LCSW is the co-founder of the Beyond Consequences Institute, LLC. Ms. Forbes has been training in the field of trauma and attachment with nationally recognized, first-generation attachment therapists since 1999. Her research and interest in the area of adoptive mothers has been a powerful asset in the adoption field. Her passion is to help adoptive mothers who are struggling with their children, to understand their situations and their family dynamics. Below is an excerpt from a recent column that addresses foster children feeling safe.

Q: In many of your articles, you mention that the parent should calm a child down by creating security for the child. I understand that much of a child's stress and fear comes from the threat of being moved to another home. Yet as a foster mom, I can never honestly say, "You are safe. You aren't going anywhere."

A: You're absolutely right. You would never want to say this to a foster child because the reality is that they probably would be moving on to another home in the future. Congratulations for being sensitive to giving your child only the truth!

What you have working for you is the present moment. The only moment we have guaranteed to us is the moment we are in. Capture this moment with your child. Say to her, "You are safe, honey. You are right here with me now." You can give security and nurturing at that moment. Help your child learn how to stay present with you in this precious space in time.

I recently had a foster mother relate a story to me that will help you understand the power of even short term loving relationships. This foster mother had a teenage foster child in her home for a period of only one month. Eight years later, after the child had aged out of the system and was on her own as an adult, she and the foster mother reconnected. The former foster child told this foster mother that the turning point in her life was when she was at her home. The love, safety, security, and acceptance that she was given by this foster mother changed her life and gave this former foster child the ability to move forward. *She relayed how this placement, only one month in length, was the best placement she had EVER had.*

You are an important part of your foster child's journey. Never underestimate the importance of your time with her, whether it is short or long term, and your ability to create safety and security in each moment, despite an uncertain future.

FOSTER PRIDE/ADOPT PRIDE at Children's Bureau means:

Making an informed decision about willingness, ability and resources to:

- protect and nurture children;
- meet developmental needs and address delays;
- support relationships with birth families;
- connect to safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime;
- work as a member of a professional team.

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.

We would love to hear from you!