

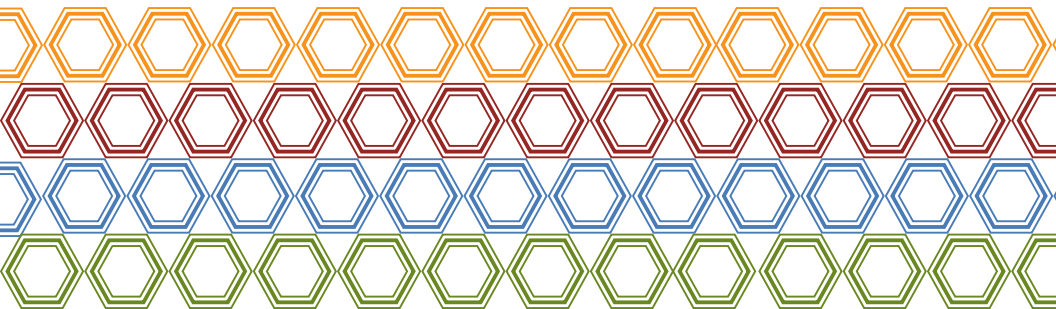


MAKE A DIFFERENCE

## FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION INFORMATION GUIDE



Open Your Life. Adopt.  
**frameworks**  
A program of Mission West Virginia  
866-CALL-MWV





# frameworks

Dear Prospective Parent,

Thank you for your interest in becoming a foster and/or adoptive parent. There are over 4,000 children in foster care in West Virginia and approximately 1,000 of those children are eligible for adoption and dreaming of a family of their own.

At Mission West Virginia, Inc., we want to help make that dream come true for a waiting child by connecting potential foster and/or adoptive families with the proper agencies and workers. Mission West Virginia, Inc. is not a direct provider of foster care/ adoption services including home study certification or the placement of children. We are here to provide you with foster care and adoption information and help you choose the right agency and type of placement that fits your family. If you have any questions, please contact Mission West Virginia at 866-CALL-MWV.

In this booklet, you will find information on foster care and adoption, the process of certification and a list of agencies that can serve you. Each family is required to be certified before a child can be placed in their home. This not only benefits the child, but helps to prepare the family as well. The training and certification is a time for you to ask questions, become acquainted with aspects of foster care and adoption and learn how to best provide for children who may have been abused and/or neglected.



If you would like to find out more about specific children in need of adoption, you can visit any of the following websites:

**[www.adoptavvchild.org](http://www.adoptavvchild.org)**

**[www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org)**

**[www.missionwv.org/frameworks](http://www.missionwv.org/frameworks)**

So remember, stay encouraged and know that even after that tug at your heart fades there are still children waiting on a family just like yours to make their dreams come true. We will follow up with you periodically to assist you throughout the process. In the meantime, we are here for you so please give us a call if you need anything along the way. We wish you well on your journey toward fostering and adopting.

Respectfully,

Mission West Virginia, Inc.  
FrameWorks Program Staff





## Why not me? An excerpt from "A Family for Every Child"

Below are quotes from children in foster care on why they deserve a Forever Family

### **I DESERVE TO...**

**have someone's eyes light up when they see me!**

**have the whole room sing Happy Birthday at my own birthday party!**

**have a Grandpa, Grandma, Uncles, Aunts, and Cousins!**

**know where I am going to be today, tomorrow, and always!**

**have the same person tuck me in bed every night!**

**have someone come to my school performances!**

**hear how great I am every day!**

**have someone love me even when I am unlovable!**

**be embarrassed by my parents when I am a teenager, because they are my parents!**

**NOT WAIT ANY LONGER!**



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# STEPS TO FOSTER AND/OR ADOPT

## STEP ONE: SELECT AND CONTACT AN AGENCY

The agency you chose to complete your certification with will depend on your personal needs and characteristics. This will vary from person to person depending on each parent's time frame and many other factors. Mission West Virginia is not a foster/adoption agency however we have provided you with a listing of licensed, foster/adoption agencies in the beginning of this booklet.

## STEP TWO: COMPLETE AND SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION

Each agency's application process is different. The application should be included in the information packet provided by your agency or can be obtained by contacting the agency and expressing an interest.

## STEP THREE: ATTEND TRAINING

Training is intended to prepare you for fostering/adopting and explain the details of becoming a foster/adoptive family. The training is designed to help you gain the best possible understanding and preparation for parenting an foster or adopted.

In a two parent household, both parents are required to attend training. The standard training in West Virginia is called PRIDE. Training schedules vary between agencies, however many try to accommodate workday schedules and host trainings on evenings or weekends.

## STEP FOUR: COMPLETE A HOMESTUDY

Everyone must complete a home study. The process can take anywhere from three months to over a year, depending on the agency, the worker, and your own cooperation. A social worker will interview everyone in the household. Your social worker will also discuss what type of child you could best provide care for. All information gathered during the homestudy is kept confidential.

The following items are commonly requested during the homestudy process:

- Copies of birth certificates, marriage licenses, divorce decrees, vehicle registration and insurance, driver's license, etc.
- Child abuse, criminal record clearances and fingerprints for all members of your household over eighteen (these will be conducted





- by your agency)
- Income verification
- A statement of health signed by a physician (form provided by your agency)
- Other forms provided by your agency

## STEP FIVE: ENGAGE IN THE FOSTER OR ADOPTIVE PLACEMENT PROCESS

**Foster Care:** When a family becomes certified they are approved for the specific ages, genders and number of children that they have the capacity to care for. When children are in need of foster placement a worker will call you and inquire if you are interested in the potential placement. The child will live in your home while attempts are made to reunify the family. If the family cannot be reunified, the child will become eligible for adoption.

**Adoption:** Once a family is chosen for a child for adoption, visitation must occur to orient the child and family with each other. Some of these visits may be overnight or over a weekend. Pre-adoptive placement begins when the child moves in and actually lives with the chosen family. This phase lasts for a minimum of six months. The time it takes to adopt a child is different for every family and depends on individual circumstances.

## STEP SIX: FILE NECESSARY LEGAL DOCUMENTS (IF ADOPTING)

All adoptions must be finalized through the court system. Usually, your selected child will live with you for at least 6 months before the adoption begins to be finalized. After this 6 month period, adoption paperwork is completed and filed with the courts.

## STEP SEVEN: FINALIZE ADOPTION (IF ADOPTING)

This is the final step in the adoption process. Your adoption will be finalized in front of a judge, you then become the legal parent(s).



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### WHAT IS FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION?

Foster care is the temporary placement of a child while a permanent plan for their future is being developed. In some cases, a foster placement will lead to adoption. Foster care is intended to be short-term care for children who cannot safely remain with their families. Children are in foster care as a result of abuse and/or neglect. The ultimate goal of foster care is for children to return home, also called reunification. If the child's birth parents are unable to safely parent their child(ren) and make the changes that are necessary, the parent(s) can voluntarily give up their parental rights OR the court can terminate the parents' rights. The child(ren) is/are then legally eligible for adoption, which can be finalized in a court of law. The adoptive parent then becomes the child's legal parent and has the same formal and legal responsibility for the child as if they were the biological parent.

### CRITERIA TO BECOME A FOSTER OR ADOPTIVE FAMILY

You must be 21 years of age or older.

Have a stable & secure income.

Be in good physical/mental health.

Your home can pass a safety inspection.

You are free of any child abuse reports and free of a criminal background.

Have a stable family relationship.

You can provide a child with opportunities for personal development and commit to a child for the duration of the placement.

### WHAT IS "SPECIAL NEEDS" ADOPTION?

Mission West Virginia's primary focus is on "special needs" children. Many children in WV awaiting adoption are considered "special needs." "Special needs" is often another way to say "waiting children." This does not necessarily reflect any problems the child may have. While some of the children who wait have a physical,





emotional or educational challenge, many are healthy and are doing well developmentally. The characteristics that are used to describe “special needs” are defined as:

- Over the age of eight (8)
- Members of a racial or ethnic minority
- Children with disabling physical, mental and/or emotional problems.
- A member of a sibling group who should be placed together
- Has been certified as a special needs child by the DHHR

Many children awaiting adoptive families were removed from their biological families due to abuse, neglect or abandonment. These children have endured hardships, sadness, loss of relationships, and abuse. All of these children deserve a permanent home. Without a permanent, loving adoptive home, these children face the likelihood of entering adulthood with no parental guidance or support. We believe that ALL CHILDREN deserve a loving, safe home.

### **WHO ARE THE CHILDREN AWAITING ADOPTION?**

Children available for adoption are in the custody of the WV DHHR. Some of these children have been abused, neglected or abandoned. The majority of these children are considered special needs. The WV DHHR website ([www.adoptawvchild.org](http://www.adoptawvchild.org)) contains pictures and biographies of many children available for adoption. You may also visit Mission West Virginia’s website at [www.missionwv.org](http://www.missionwv.org) for more photographs of children and the national photo listing at [www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org).

### **IS THERE A COST TO BECOME AN ADOPTIVE OR FOSTER PARENT?**

There is NO COST to adopt from foster care. Private agencies may have fees for infant or international adoption. Financial subsidies are also available for special needs children to assist with general and medical care.



## WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN LIVING WHILE WAITING TO BE ADOPTED?

Most children waiting for adoptive families live in temporary foster homes. Others reside in group homes or residential facilities.

## HOW LONG DOES THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS TAKE?

The certification process varies across the state, anywhere from three months to more than a year. Families can begin by collecting required paperwork for their home study as well as learning about upcoming trainings being offered in their county or neighboring communities. In addition, the Criminal Background Checks that are required may vary in the length of time they are received from the clearing agency.

## WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS?

In order to be certified as a foster/adoptive family, families must complete the PRIDE training course and have a completed homestudy.

**PRIDE training** is a required curriculum for families interested in foster care and/or adoption. The training covers topics such as child abuse/neglect, emotional and behavioral issues, discipline, and overviews of adoption and foster care. The training is an excellent opportunity to meet other families who are going through the process as well. It is also an opportunity to become more aware and educated about adoption and foster parenting, dispel myths, and ease fears.

The **homestudy** is a comprehensive report of your family and home environment. The homestudy also examines your financial, physical, emotional and psychological capabilities to parent a child. The completed homestudy includes an application, summary of your family's history, interviews, criminal background and child abuse clearances. The worker may visit your home up to three times. The timeline of the homestudy can vary from family to family.



## WHAT OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO ME?

There are numerous options available to families that are considering adoption. These can include:

- Foster-to-adopt
- Adoption from the foster care system
- Private adoption
- International adoption

Mission West Virginia primarily works with families that are interested in foster parenting, foster-to-adopt and adopting from the foster care system; however, we are a neutral referring agency who can assist you with finding the adoption that works best for your family.

## WHAT CHARACTERISTICS ARE AGENCIES LOOKING FOR IN ADOPTIVE AND FOSTER PARENTS?

Agencies are looking for stable and sensitive people who are able to offer the child a safe, loving and nurturing environment. The foster/adoptive parent must also be willing and able to address the needs of the child placed in their home (behavior, school-related, medical, etc.).



# MYTHS AND REALITIES ABOUT FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION

## MYTH:

You have to have a lot of money and own a house to adopt from foster care.

## REALITY:

You don't need to own your own home, be wealthy, have children already, or be a stay-at-home parent to adopt. Most adoptions from foster care are free and any minimal costs associated with them are often reimbursable. In addition, there are many different types of post-adoption resources, such as medical assistance and financial adoption assistance, based on the special needs of a child, to help support and sustain adoptions from the U.S. foster care system.

## MYTH:

Each child has to have a room of their own.

## REALITY:

Each child needs a bed of their own, not a room of their own. They also need a space for their personal belongings. In some instances, however, there may be child-to-square-feet requirements or behavioral concerns that will prevent children from being able to share a room.

## MYTH:

You can't adopt a child or sibling group from another State.

## REALITY:

There are 102,000 children in U.S. foster care available for adoption. Families adopt children from outside their state every single month. Sometimes these adoptions can take a little longer because of the process involved with moving a child from one state to another. However, the wait is worth it in the end.



### MYTH:

A birth parent or another relative can take an adopted child back.

### REALITY:

Adoptions of children from U.S. foster care are legally binding agreements that do not occur until the rights of all parents have been legally terminated by a court of law. It's very rare that an adoption is challenged in court by a child's birth relative.

### MYTH:

Only married couples can foster or adopt.

### REALITY:

Families of all shapes and sizes foster and adopt. You can be married, single, divorced, or live with a partner. Some families begin to foster and adopt as a way to build their family- other families might not begin until their children are older and are beginning to leave home. There is no "perfect" type of foster or adoptive family- all types of families are needed for all types of kids.



# FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION INFORMATION GUIDE

The purpose of this guide is to offer information about foster care and adoption; however, state and private agencies may change their policies and procedures.

**In West Virginia, there are several foster care and adoption agencies** that can certify foster and adoptive parents. We have included a listing of those agencies, along with their coverage area and contact information. We encourage you to interview multiple agencies to find the one that best fits your family, location and circumstances. All agencies work with children in the Department of Health and Human Resources' (DHHR's) custody.

## SUGGESTED LIST OF QUESTIONS TO ASK EACH AGENCY

- Where is the nearest office located?
- How many families does the agency serve in your community/state?
- Do they provide foster care and/or adoption services?
- Do they have support groups and if so, when and where do they meet?
- What is their upcoming training schedule?
- Where do they offer training?
- What type of parents does the agency seek?
- What does the homestudy entail?
- Can the agency provide references from parents who recently adopted or fostered?
- What post-placement resources does the agency provide or connect to parents?
- Do they offer continuing education and if so, what have been their most recent topics?





## ADOPTION FOCUSED:

- What kind of children does the agency place (ages, backgrounds, etc.)?
- How many children has the agency placed in the past few years?
- How will the agency conduct a child search for me?
- What criteria does the agency use to match children with families?
- How long, on average, must one wait for a child?
- How much does a completed adoption cost — in total and each part?



## WEST VIRGINIA FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION AGENCIES IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER.



### **Braley & Thompson**

Coverage in: Kanawha, Putnam, Lincoln, and Boone counties.

#### **Contact Information:**

304-720-2331

[www.btkids.com](http://www.btkids.com)



### **Burlington United Methodist Family Services**

Offices in: Beckley, Fairmont, Grafton, Keyser, and Burlington, coverage throughout the state except eastern panhandle.

#### **Contact Information:**

304-265-1338 or 877-23CHILD

[www.bumfs.org](http://www.bumfs.org)



### **Children's Home Society of West Virginia**

Offices in: Charleston, Morgantown, Parkersburg, Martinsburg, Summersville, Lewisburg, Romney, Princeton, Wheeling, covering surrounding areas.

#### **Contact Information:**

304-345-3894

[www.childhswv.org](http://www.childhswv.org)

[childrenshomesociety@childhswv.org](mailto:childrenshomesociety@childhswv.org)





### **Genesis Youth Center, Inc.**

Offices in: Clarksburg, offering services throughout the state.

#### **Contact information:**

304-622-1907 or 304-615-1289

[www.genesisyouthcenter.com](http://www.genesisyouthcenter.com)



### **KVC Behavioral Healthcare.**

Offices in: Logan, Beckley, Mullens, Lincoln, Charleston, Wayne, Ripley and Spencer, covering surrounding areas.

#### **Contact Information:**

304-347-9818 or 800-835-5277

[www.kvc.org](http://www.kvc.org)



### **The National Youth Advocate Program**

Coverage in northcentral WV plus Berkeley, Jefferson and Morgan counties.

#### **Contact Information:**

304-366-5832 or 1-877-NYAP-CAN

[www.nyap.org](http://www.nyap.org)



### **NECCO**

Coverage in: Cabell, Wayne, Putnam, Mason, Lincoln, Kanawha, Jackson, Roane, Logan, Mingo, Boone, Nicholas and Wyoming counties.

#### **Contact Information:**

304-733-0036

[www.necco.org](http://www.necco.org)



### **Potomac Center**

Coverage in: Eastern Panhandle and Elkins area.

#### **Contact Information:**

304-538-8111

[www.potomaccenter.com](http://www.potomaccenter.com)



### **Pressley Ridge**

Offices in: Beckley, Clarksburg, Morgantown and Ona, coverage throughout the state.

#### **Contact Information:**

304-252-1106

[www.pressleyridge.org](http://www.pressleyridge.org)



### **Try-Again Homes**

Coverage in: Wood, Calhoun, Jackson, Ritchie, Clay, Pleasant and Roane counties.

#### **Contact Information:**

304-422-3159 or 800-242-7213

[www.try-againhomes.org](http://www.try-againhomes.org)



Your Mission West Virginia contact is Rachel Kinder at [rkinder@missionwv.org](mailto:rkinder@missionwv.org) or call 866-CALL-MWV



**Open Your Life.**

Open Your Life.  
frameworks

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## ABOUT MISSION WEST VIRGINIA



Mission West Virginia is a non-profit organization that collaborates with public and private entities, equipping them to utilize existing resources to form new partnerships, encouraging innovative social change and building stronger communities in West Virginia. Mission West Virginia is a unique nonprofit organization made up of three programs that work to build stronger communities in West Virginia. Each program plays an important role in making Mission West Virginia a success. These programs include:



**THINK (Teaching Health Instead of Nagging Kids)** is a program that works to equip individuals, particularly youth, with the knowledge and skills to make smart and healthy decisions. THINK works to accomplish this goal by providing classes in school and community settings on a variety of topics to equip youth for a brighter future.



**FrameWorks'** primary goal is to find loving families for children waiting in the foster care system. FrameWorks strives to achieve this goal through raising awareness of the need for adoptive and foster families in West Virginia and by supporting those families through the process.

The FrameWorks program has partnered with the DHHR since 2001, working with kinship/relative care, recruiting foster/adoptive parents and recruiting families for specific children who are waiting for permanency.



**E-impact** acts as an umbrella under which all of the organization's technology projects are coordinated. E-impact focuses on providing computer hardware and training to people across the state. The people we reach often find it difficult, if not impossible, to bridge the digital divide. These projects aid in developing the skills needed to succeed in the information age.







## MORE ABOUT THE FRAMEWORKS PROGRAM

### WENDY'S WONDERFUL KIDS

A signature program of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, Wendy's Wonderful Kids employs two recruiters who work one-on-one with waiting children to form relationships and develop individualized recruitment plans. The program is a valuable resource for achieving permanency for waiting children.

### RELATIVES AS PARENT PROGRAM (RAPP)

The Relatives as Parents Program works with kinship families to provide information, referral and support services. The RAPP program hosts a "warm line" to assist caregivers as well as providing a resource guide. The program hosts workshops and trainings on topics relevant to kinship care providers and works with kinship care support groups throughout the state.

### THE HEART GALLERY

The Heart Gallery is an interactive photo exhibit that spotlights children available for adoption through professional portraits. The Heart Gallery is placed on exhibit throughout West Virginia to bring awareness about adoption in general, but also to attract families to adopt the specific children featured on the Heart Gallery. The Heart Gallery only features children that are legally eligible for adoption.

### THE BRIDGE

The Bridge is a newly launched initiative that has awarded scholarships to children in foster care and helps with academic performance of those children through educational advocacy and support.



## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

**CELEBRATIONS!** - Provides children with special opportunities and positive experiences while in foster care or after adoptions. A worker or parent may apply for funds to grant a special wish for a child. Ideas include but are not limited to: a special lesson or camp that the child is interested in, a sibling visit for siblings placed separately, an adoption party or celebration of a milestone in the child's life. For an application or more information contact Carol Phipps at [cphipp@missionwv.org](mailto:cphipp@missionwv.org) or 304-562-0723.

**CARE PACKAGES** - Many children in foster care who are legally eligible for adoption are waiting for a family. While they are waiting, you can brighten their lives with care packages. Kids especially like receiving something extra special at holidays and for their birthday; you can make them feel special and cared about while they are waiting for a forever family.

**DONATE** - Mission West Virginia is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization. Donations will go toward the FrameWorks program to assist with achieving our goal of finding families for waiting children in West Virginia.

**HOST THE HEART GALLERY** - We are continually seeking new exhibit sites to host the Gallery. If your business, place of work or church has a space where potential families could see photos of waiting children, we would be happy to set up the Gallery and can also make a special presentation about FrameWorks and waiting children.

**SPREAD THE WORD!** - Follow us on Facebook and share featured children who are waiting for a family! Visit [www.facebook.com/frameworksMWV](http://www.facebook.com/frameworksMWV)





# The Carry - On Campaign

866-CALL- MWV - [cdawson@missionwv.org](mailto:cdawson@missionwv.org)

**Providing luggage for children in foster care.**



**GIVE  
THANKS  
AND  
CARRY  
ON**

**No child should have to leave home carrying only a garbage bag.** Please help by donating new or gently used luggage or duffle bags. In addition, if you are able, please pack them with some of these essential items for children in foster care:

- \*toothbrush & paste
- \*non-perishable snacks
- \*hair brush or comb
- \*books
- \*journal
- \*flip flops
- \*toothbrush container
- \*crayons
- \*blanket
- \*coloring books
- \*disposable camera
- \*flashlight
- \*toiletries
- \*travel soap

**"They had never really had NEW things like this before and to see the smiles those bags brought to their faces was awesome. It made their transition to the foster homes a lot easier as they could think about something else during the trip."**

**-- Child Protective Services Worker**

Partners: Mission WV, Inc.; WV DHHR; US Attorney's Office,  
Southern District of WV; WV Endangered Children Task Force;  
WV Child Advocacy Network.



## ADOPTION STORIES

### MEET THE W FAMILY



After giving consideration to both domestic and international adoption, I was having difficulty coming to a final decision. Finally, I decided to apply for foster care to continue exploring adoption. The PRIDE training provided was full of resources, but also daunting in the realization of the issues that a foster parent can be faced with when caring for children in foster care. After much prayer and thought, I felt that foster care was the right route for me. My heart and mind felt comfortable with this decision.

It was many months before I received my first placement with two amazing little men who were 4 and eighteen months at the time. I was absolutely terrified when I realized the social worker was going to leave the three of us alone and I would be temporarily responsible as their sole provider. Almost immediately I fell in love with their beautiful smiles and the way they accepted me. Over the next year and a half, we worked together to become a family with the help of the team from the WV DHHR who provided hands to hold, shoulders to lean on and referrals when needed. Our family was formalized in the fall of 2006 and each day we have together is a Blessing.



God Bless the Broken Road is a song all 3 of us recognize as a description of our path from our broken lives to the completion of our family. People often say that I am a remarkable woman to take in two rambunctious boys through foster care and then adopt them as my own. They do not realize that these amazing little men are the ones in our family who are truly remarkable in their flexibility and desire to shower me with unconditional love and acceptance. It is through them that I have grown and found what is important in life.

## MEET THE C FAMILY



I initially proposed the idea of foster care and adoption to my husband Aaron when the questions began: infant, adolescent, or teen, boy or girl and so on. Nothing was decided, and nothing was certain. All we knew for sure was that we wanted to make a positive impact on a child's life right here in the Mountain State. Little did we know we would soon meet a young man who would make the biggest impact on us.

I grew up in a very supportive family where the word *family* didn't always mean *blood*. *Family* meant the people in your life who want you in theirs, those people who never let you go through anything alone, and who stand behind you accepting you for you and loving you no matter what. My mother was raised by her Grandmother, I have Aunts who fostered, and helping one another just seemed to come easy to me.

My husband and I submitted our interest to become a foster/adoptive parent online in November 2011 and waited. I had an internal monologue of questions; could I even be a good mom? Did Aaron and I have “what it takes”? All those questions took a back seat when we received our information packet in the mail and we began PRIDE classes. We soon realized we weren’t the only couple who “had concerns” about our ability to parent. Could we be everything our “soon to be” child would want? Could we fulfill the role of “Mom” and “Dad”? We wouldn’t know until we tried, and when we did, we realized you don’t have to be perfect.

As each PRIDE class began and ended, one thing remained at the top of our hearts - statistically, the foster care system has many older children eligible for adoption. “Every child deserves a home” was a statement that rang loud and clear as we told our home finder, “We want a child over the age of 8. If we are meant to be parents through adoption, we want to parent an older child.”

It was September 28, 2012 when our lives changed forever. This blonde hair, blue eyed, young man captured our hearts when we introduced ourselves and he shook our hand. At the end of our first meeting, Aaron and I left, and as we drove away, we cried and prayed. “What if he doesn’t like us? What if he doesn’t want to see us again? Did he believe us when we told him we would see him again?” We later found out, he was just as nervous as we were.

Josh came to live with us just 10 days before his 13th birthday. Here we went, head first into the teenage years, but to us, it was about being more than just parents, it was about being his family. Parenting Joshua has been very rewarding. We approach struggles, successes, and responsibilities as a team. Chores, homework, sadness, happiness, are all a “team Currey” approach. When Joshua is feeling down, has a challenge at school, is upset – we game plan. He understands that he has a voice in our home; his opinion counts and will always be considered.

Bonding with any child - infant, adolescent, or teen isn’t something that happens overnight. Just like any relationship, it takes time, consistency, dedication, and love. In our example, Joshua had to trust us just as much as we had to trust him. We made sure to ask him what his expectations were of us as parents and we made sure to openly





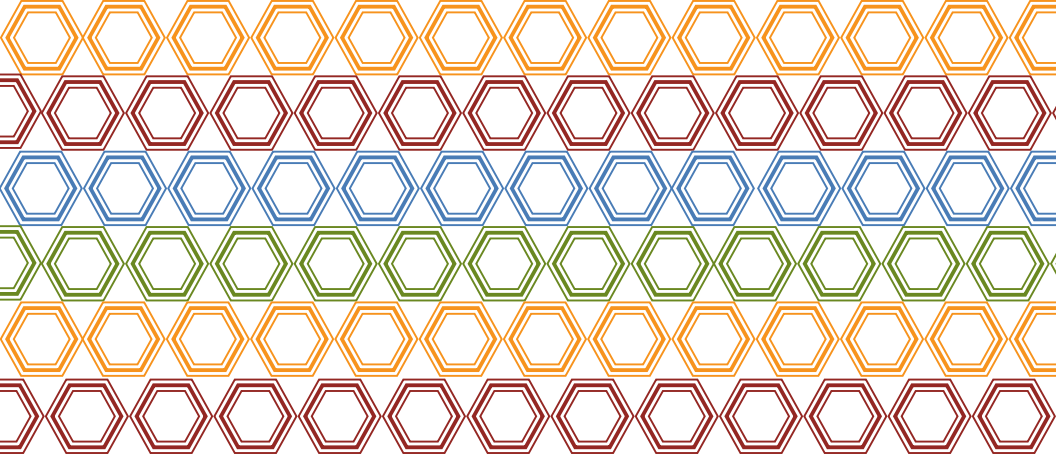
discuss our expectations of him in our home. We addressed things like behavior, manners, school, and honesty. It wouldn't have been fair of us to automatically assume Joshua knew what we expected unless we told him. And even then, our expectations were not going to be met overnight, just as his expectations of us as parents would be something we would have to work on. Consistency in our message as parents makes Joshua feel more comfortable in his decisions; he always knows where we stand and is able to better predict the outcome of his actions.

We always say, "If you don't tell us, we don't know." I've told Joshua many times that a load weighing a hundred pounds is a lot easier lifted when you have friends or family to carry it with. Joshua is a resilient, intelligent, and thoughtful young man who has taught us so much already about the joys of being a parent. From cheering him on at his lacrosse games, to helping him finish his homework... each and every minute is worth repeating.

It's important to Joshua to be able to talk freely about his birth family with us. When he has questions about his brothers and sisters, it's important that I am able to answer them. I have made it a priority to learn birth dates, names, and remember stories he tells me. I want to be able to discuss his birth family openly and for him to feel comfortable; not running to a filing cabinet every time he has a question. So, we don't do it because we aren't afraid of heartbreak. To answer the question "Will I get my heart broken?" It already is. My heart breaks reading statistics of every child that needs a home.. to every foster / adoptive quote that comes up in my news feed on Facebook... to every abuse / neglect case seen on the local news... It's all heart breaking. Heartbreak is really just a part of living. But open yourself for heartbreak? "I could never do that" people say, and I say "yes, you could." Look once into the eyes of a child who needs you - and the love, compassion, and strength you have to provide for them is overwhelming. This is our family and this is our purpose in life.

Since the C family shared their story, they have also fostered and adopted a little girl and now Joshua has a little sister!





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## Mission West Virginia

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