

# UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

NOVEMBER 2011

*Michaela, age 17 is waiting...*

*Hazen*

Photo by: Hazen Photography

# UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

QUARTERLY DCFS NEWSLETTER



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*If you are interested in more information on any of the children featured in this publication, please contact The Adoption Exchange at 801-265-0444.*

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## **IF A CHILD....**

**If a child lives with criticism,  
he learns to condemn.**

**If a child lives with hostility,  
he learns to fight.**

**If a child lives with ridicule,  
he learns to be shy.**

**If a child lives with shame,  
he learns to feel guilty.**

**If a child lives with tolerance,  
he learns to be patient.**

**If a child lives with encouragement,  
he learns confidence.**

**If a child lives with praise,  
he learns to appreciate.**

**If a child lives with fairness,  
he learns justice.**

**If a child lives with security,  
he learns to have faith.**

**If a child lives with approval,  
he learns to like himself.**

**If a child lives with acceptance and friendship,  
He learns to find love in the world.**

**--Dorothy Law Nolte**



# Adjusting to Forever

Lisa Tokpa, COPARC Project Director

At a meeting I attended recently participants were asked to stand up and switch seats with someone else in the room. We then were told to continue the meeting in our new seats – using the last inhabitant’s pen, continuing to take notes on their paper, and even drinking whatever beverage they had from our neighbor’s cup. We all looked at each other confused, thinking, “Is she serious, are we really expected to drink from their cup and expose ourselves to someone else’s germs?” She then told us that the purse and sweater and all the belongings in the seat we were in now belonged to us so we could use them. Even though we had caught on that this was some sort of exercise to teach us something, it still produced some anxiety and discomfort for me and my fellow participants.

We all are expected to adjust to new and different situations throughout life. I have many memories of my own adjustment to a new culture that I always refer to when thinking about the difficulties of adjustment. I remember being laughed at when I couldn’t seem to wash my clothes by hand in the same mechanical way the African women did, and was laughed at even harder when I told them I didn’t know how to kill a chicken or cook a meal on a coal pot. I have a vivid memory of asserting my independence by making myself a bowl of cereal. I didn’t know how to mix the powdered milk well and it was a disaster. As my tears dropped in my barely edible breakfast, I was struck with the hard truth that adjusting to change takes time and perseverance.

The seat-changing exercise as well as my own personal experiences with adjusting to new cultures reminds me of the all-too-often unrealistic expectations we place on children who have been adopted or who find themselves in the foster care system. Not only do we sometimes expect the children in our homes to automatically know and comply with the norms of our family, but to be grateful for everything they now have. If a simple exercise like changing seats caused these kinds of emotions in us as adults, it is hard to imagine the emotions of a child who is uprooted from everything they know and love and placed in a new home with a new family.

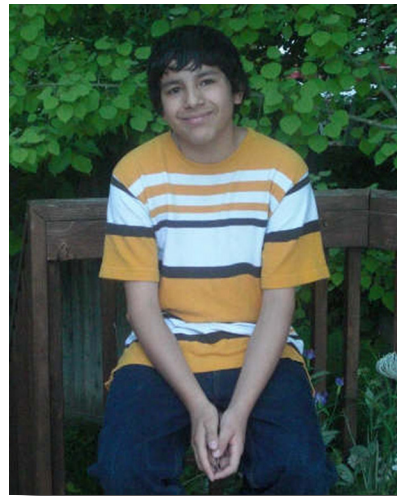
At the Colorado Post-Adoption Resource Center (CO-PARC) we talk with adoptive families from around the state who are trying to make sense of their child's behaviors and sometimes, trying to find the strength to persevere on their adoption journey when times get especially challenging. One of our most popular classes this year was Sustainable Parenting. The frequent requests for this particular topic were telling – parents need tools to help them “sustain” their journeys. Adoptive families, I believe, are some of the most inspirational people in the world. Whether they realize it or not at the beginning, their choice to adopt begins a commitment that is unparalleled to many others in this life. They are called to live a life that is paradoxical in nature to many of the values of our society. They are told to “regulate” and remain calm when their child rages at them. They are told to forgive when they see the devastating impacts of another adult's heinous actions in the daily struggles of their child. They are told to be patient when their child continues to remain distant. They are told to persevere as their child's brain chemistry changes in such a way that will allow them to trust again, to attach again, to love again.

It's easy to understand why some parents revert back to our societal paradigm of wanting instant results when faced with challenges. It is a lot easier to think that everything will be ok if we just provide our adopted children with plenty of food, new clothes, a nice house and opportunities for growth and development that they were never afforded. Some think that if we love them enough, it will “fix” them. Within these thoughts, parents can easily find themselves bewildered when their child does not seem to appreciate all that they have done for them and given to them. I have seen adoptive parents disappointed or dumbfounded when their child does not think his adoption finalization day is the best day of his life. The difficult truth is that adjusting to this

new life with a new family is a process that takes time and requires a level of patience that those outside of his personal world often will not understand.

Another truth is that there is hope if we persevere. While there is no “quick fix,” neuro-biological research is revealing evidence of astounding resiliency among traumatized children. Many families are not surprised by this – they have experienced it first-hand. And while we re-examine our expectations of our children, we should also look at the expectations we put on ourselves. To go against the flow of our culture we must have the support of others. Surround yourself with people who can support you as you seek to be patient with your child's unique adjustment process.

So no matter where you are in your journey, I challenge you to think of your own “tears in my cereal” moment and allow it to challenge your expectations. If we combine realistic expectations with enduring patience, together we can create the space for our children to adjust and hopefully, to heal.



**BEN,**  
age 15  
IS WAITING...

An active young man with many different interests, Benjamin is talented athletically and especially enjoys outdoor activities such as boating, hiking, camping, and swimming. He is always up for a challenge and enjoys hobbies such as puzzles, games and building things.

Benjamin is attending the ninth grade this year and benefits from an IEP. He is currently involved in counseling, which will need to continue after placement.

Benjamin is in need of a forever family who can offer him love, permanency, and support him in maintaining contact with his brother. If your family can provide Benjamin with the care and compassion he needs, we ask that you inquire. Financial assistance may be available for adoption-related costs.

For Utah children, only homestudied families from all states are encouraged to inquire.

# Supporting Maltreated Children: Countering the Effects of Neglect and Abuse

*This article is adapted from articles by Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D.: "Bonding and Attachment in Maltreated Children: Consequences of Emotional Neglect in Childhood," "Bonding and Attachment in Maltreated Children: How You Can Help," "The Impact of Abuse and Neglect on the Developing Brain," with John Marcellus, M.D., and "Principles of Working With Traumatized Children." These articles, and others, are online at <http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/bruceperry/index.htm>.*

This article first appeared in the summer 2011 issue of Adoptalk. Reprinted with permission from North American Council on Adoptable Children.

**T**he most important property of humankind is the capacity to form and maintain relationships. These relationships are absolutely necessary for any of us to survive, learn, work, love, and procreate.

The ability and desire to form emotional relationships is related to the organization and functioning of specific parts of the human brain—systems that develop during infancy and the first years of life. Experiences during this early vulnerable period affect a child's core attachment capabilities. A child's ability to feel empathy, be caring, inhibit aggression, love, and acquire other characteristics typical of a healthy, happy, and productive person are tied to the child's care at the beginning of life.

## How Early Neglect and Abuse Affect Attachment

Impaired childhood bonding affects people differently. Severe emotional neglect in early childhood can have devastating consequences. Children without touch, stimulation, and nurturing can literally lose the capacity to form meaningful relationships. Fortunately, most children do not suffer this degree of neglect, but millions do experience some degree of impaired bonding and attachment during early childhood. Resulting problems can range from mild interpersonal discomfort to profound social and emotional problems. In general, the level of impairment is related to how early in life the emotional neglect began as well as its severity and duration.

With help, neglected children can learn to navigate normal relationships. Clinical experiences and a number of studies suggest, though, that the path to improvement is a long, difficult, and frustrating process for families and children.

## How Abuse Affects Brain Development

During childhood, the human brain matures and brain-related capabilities develop in a sequential fashion. With optimal experiences, the brain develops healthy, flexible, and diverse capabilities.

Disruptions in the timing, intensity, quality, or quantity of normal development, however, can adversely affect neurodevelopment and function. Traumatic experiences trigger a state of fear-related activation in abused and neglected children's brains. Chronic activation of the adaptive fear response can cause a persistent fear state that in turn causes hyper-vigilance, increased muscle tone, a focus on threat-related cues, anxiety, and behavioral impulsivity. These attributes are helpful during a threatening event but counter-productive when the threat has passed.

The very process of proper adaptive neural response during a threat underlies the neural pathology that causes so much distress and pain through the child's life. The chronically traumatized child will develop a host of physical signs (altered cardiovascular regulation) and symptoms (attention, sleep, and mood problems) that make life more difficult.

There is hope. The brain is very plastic and can change in response to experiences, especially those that are repetitive and patterned.

## Specific Problems in Maltreated Children with Attachment Problems

Specific problems vary depending upon the nature, intensity, duration, and timing of neglect and abuse. Some children will have profound and obvious problems; others will have very subtle problems that do not seem to relate to early life neglect. Below are some clues that experienced clinicians consider when working with maltreated children.

- **Developmental delays:** The bond between a young child and her caregivers provides the major vehicle for physical, emotional, and cognitive development. Lack of consistent and enriched experiences in early childhood can cause delays in motor, language, social, and cognitive development.
- **Eating:** Odd eating behaviors are common, especially in children with severe neglect and attachment problems. They will hoard and hide food, or eat as if the food will disappear any moment. They may fail to thrive, ruminate (throw up food), and have swallowing problems.
- **Soothing behavior:** These children may use primitive and bizarre soothing behaviors, especially when stressed. They may bang their heads, rock, chant, scratch, or bite/cut themselves.
- **Emotional functioning:** A range of emotional issues—including depression and anxiety—is common in maltreated children. Another common trait is "indiscriminate attachment," affectionate behaviors with relatively unknown people to secure safety rather than develop an emotional bond.
- **Inappropriate modeling:** Children model adult behavior. Maltreated children who learn that abusive behavior is the "right" way to interact with others have problems in social situations. Children who have been sexually abused are at-risk of being further victimized or perpetrating on younger children.
- **Aggression:** Childhood aggression and cruelty often result from a lack of empathy and poor impulse control. These children really do not understand or feel what it is like for others when they do or say something hurtful.

## Helping Maltreated Children

Responsive adults—parents, teachers, and other caregivers—make all the difference for children. They can:

**Nurture these children.** They need to be held, rocked, and cuddled. But be aware that, for many children, touch has been associated with pain, torture, or sexual abuse. Observe how your child responds to nurturing and act accordingly. In many ways, you are providing experiences that should have taken place during infancy.

**Try to understand the behaviors before punishing a child.** The more you can learn about attachment problems, bonding, and development, the more you will be able to develop useful interventions. If your child hoards food, for example, do

not accuse him of stealing. A punitive approach may increase the child's sense of insecurity and need to hoard food.

**Interact with children at their emotional age.** Abused and neglected children are often emotionally and socially delayed. When they are frustrated or fearful, they will regress, and as much as you want the children to "act their age," they simply cannot. Interact at their emotional level. If they are tearful, frustrated, or overwhelmed (emotionally age two), use soothing non-verbal interactions. Hold them. Rock them. Sing quietly.

**Be consistent, predictable, and repetitive.** Maltreated children with attachment problems are very sensitive to new situations. Social events (parties, sleepovers, trips) can overwhelm them, even if they are pleasant. Efforts to make life consistent, predictable, and repetitive are very important. When children feel safe, they can benefit from the nurturing and enriching experiences you provide.

**Model and teach appropriate social behaviors.** Many abused and neglected children do not know how to interact with others. To teach them, model behaviors and narrate for the child what you are doing and why: "I am going to the sink to wash my hands before dinner because..." or "I take the soap and put it on my hands like this..."

You can even coach maltreated children as they play with other children. Use play-by-play: "Well, when you take that from someone, they probably feel pretty upset; so if you want them to have fun when you play this game, then you should try..." Over time, success with other children will make the child less socially awkward and aggressive.

Maltreated children can have problems modulating physical contact. They don't know when to hug, how close to stand, when to make/break eye contact, or at what times they can wipe their nose, touch their genitals, or do grooming tasks. Do not lecture the child about "appropriate behavior;" gently suggest how she can interact differently with adults and children ("Why don't you sit over here?"). Make lessons clear using as few words as possible, and explain in a way that will not make the child feel bad or guilty.

**Listen to and talk with your children.** Whenever you can, sit, listen, and play with your children. When you are quiet and interactive with them, they often will

## Additional Tips for Working with Traumatized Children

- Don't be afraid to talk about traumatic events. When the child brings something up, listen, answer questions, and provide comfort and support.
- Provide consistent, predictable patterns each day. When the pattern changes, tell the child beforehand and explain why the pattern is different.
- Discuss your expectations for behavior and your style of discipline. Make sure the child understands the rules.
- Watch for signs of re-enactment (in play, behaviors), avoidance (being withdrawn, avoiding other children), and physiological hyper-reactivity (anxiety, sleep problems, behavioral impulsivity).
- Protect the child. Do not hesitate to cut short or stop activities that are upsetting or re-traumatizing for the child.
- Give the child choices and a sense of control. When a child chooses an activity, he will feel safer and be able to feel, think, and act more maturely.
- **Ask for help when you need it!**

begin to show and tell you what is really inside them. Practice this—slow down, quit worrying about the next task, and really relax into the moment with a child.

At these moments, teach children about their feelings. Use these principles: (1) All feelings (sad, glad, mad, etc.) are okay to feel; (2) Children should know healthy ways to act when sad, glad, or

mad; (3) Other people feel and show feelings—"How do you think Bobby feels when you push him?" (4) When you sense that the child is clearly happy, sad, or mad, ask them how they are feeling.

**Have realistic expectations.** Abused and neglected children have a lot to overcome. We cannot predict potential, but we do know how to measure a child's emotional, behavioral, social, and physical strengths and weaknesses. Skilled clinicians can help to define a child's skill areas and areas where progress will be slower.

**Be patient with the child's progress and with yourself.** Progress will be slow and frustrating. Many adults, especially adoptive parents, will feel inadequate because all the love, time, and effort they exert on their child's behalf may not seem to work. But it does. It just takes time.

**Take care of yourself.** Caring for maltreated children can be exhausting and demoralizing. Adults cannot provide the consistent, predictable, enriching, and nurturing care these children need if they are depleted; they must get rest and support. Respite care can be crucial for parents, who should also rely on friends, family, and community resources.

**Investigate other resources.** Many communities have support groups for adoptive or foster families. Professionals who specialize in attachment problems can also help. Remember, the earlier and more aggressive the interventions, the better children will be able to heal and thrive. ♦



Jamie, age 16 is a fashionista. She is a trendy teenager who loves to look nice and dress up. Jamie is currently attending the ninth grade and benefits from an IEP. She is doing well in school and would thrive with academically supportive parents. Jamie is attending counseling, which will need to continue after placement.

If your family can provide the love and support this fantastic girl deserves, we urge you to inquire. Financial assistance may be available for adoption-related services. For Utah children, only homestudied families from all states are encouraged to inquire.

*Jamie is waiting...*



### The 411 on Social Media, Networking and Texting!

“I get frustrated when my niece and nephew are tappity tap tapping away in their own worlds,” says Johnnie, a relative caregiver and foster parent. “I feel left out, until I remember that I really wasn’t so different when I was that age. We didn’t have cell phones and computers, but we still had our own worlds and, above all, we wanted our privacy.”

#### What Exactly Is Social Media, Anyway?

Social media is any form of communication between people and the internet. It’s a large list of online activities that include:

- Talking (using Voice Over Internet Protocol or VOIP)
- Sharing media files like pictures and videos
- Social networking
- Video gaming
- Web logs or “blogs”

While many of us are familiar with *Facebook* or *YouTube*, in reality, there are too many social media outlets to mention. Focus on the popular websites for now, but know that what’s

popular can change quickly, and you always want to stay a little ahead of your kids if possible. (Or okay, not *too* many steps behind.)

#### Popular Social Technology Definitions and Destinations

*Social Networking* websites like *Facebook* and *MySpace* are used as ways to communicate, share pictures, music and videos. Facebook has become

increasingly popular over the past five years and has millions of users worldwide. It requires users to have an individual e-mail account and be above the age of 13.

Once a person has a *Facebook* account, he or she can “friend” people by accepting requests. The site has several security settings that may hide or not hide each user’s information.

For example, in the Spring of 2010, *Facebook* changed its default settings to make it much easier for people to see other people’s information, but a lot of people weren’t aware of the change that took place. It’s crucial to know how to set and check account settings.



*Blogs* are basically online journaling websites. A blog is similar to *Facebook* and *MySpace*, but is more focused. Think of a blog as an online diary or an extended holiday newsletter. There are privacy settings for blogs so you can control who can view them. Blogs can display pictures, text, videos and links to other sites.

*MMOGs (Video Gaming)* stands for Massively Multi-player Online Game. Some of the popular games are *Crossfire*, *World of Warcraft*, *Doom* and *SimCity*. Today’s MMOGs can have thousands of users worldwide playing one specific game online at a time. Often MMOGs are played on computers, cell phones and with video game units like the Xbox, Wii and PlayStation.



Johnnie says she didn't realize at first that when her kids started to play online video games, they were also "chatting" with other players. That "chat" led to her niece talking (on her cell phone) to a person claiming to be a 24-year-old man in Texas (or possibly a 45-year old woman in Arizona since no one really knows anything about anyone online). This person ultimately told Johnnie to butt out—he was going to marry her niece as soon as she turned 18. "And this," says Johnnie, "is how today's world is not at all like the world I grew up in as a teen!"

*Instant Messaging (IMing)* is a way to communicate with others online. The cool thing about IMing is that you can have online real time text chats (private conversations) with one or more people. IMing can be done within browsers such as Yahoo or with services like Twitter or AOL.

Certain websites like *Skype* let users have conversations using video calling technology, as well, if you have a video camera. There is a specific IM text language known as SMS language, which stands for Short Message Service. If you understand what LOL means, then you've already encountered this language. BTW (by the way) LOL means "laughing out loud."

*Text messaging or texting* is a form communication between cell phones over cell phone networks. Texting also uses the SMS language and is extremely popular. Many people find texting quicker and more effective than talking.

*Video and picture sharing websites like YouTube, Flickr and Photobucket* let account users upload videos and pictures from various electronic devices like cell phones, cameras and video recorders. *YouTube* is a public website, and users are allowed to watch videos without having an

account. To post something on *YouTube*, however, you need to an account, and that allows you to control privacy settings. *YouTube* videos can also be shared and cross-posted on other websites.

*Twitter* is a social networking service that allows users to provide small updates, messages or entries using less than 140 characters using the SMS text language. The messages, once posted, are called "tweets." Twitter also allows users to cross-post and share on other websites.

*Forums and message boards* provide places on the internet for people to discuss, meet or ask questions, usually about one main subject. There are thousands of message boards and forums. Some require that you become a member and have a user name and password before joining. Forums and message boards are not done in real time, meaning users have to wait for others to read their message and respond.

One message board you might want to encourage your child to go to is <http://fyi3.com/>, which is run by FosterClub. There's also a message board on the same site for foster parents.

### **Safety**

When talking about social technology or media, safety is a valid concern. Check out our tipsheet, *Internet Safety Tips for Caregivers*, that addresses safety-related issues and discusses *Family Internet Agreements*. <http://wifostercareandadoption.org/site/indexer/561/library/392/internetsafety.pdf>

### **Social Media Agreements**

Social media agreements are a great way for foster families, social workers, birth families and youth to talk about how youth will use social media. Here are links to media agreements for certain ages.

**Kindergarten to 5th Grade:**

<http://commonsensemedia.org/common-sense-family-media-agreement-grades-k-5>

**6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> Grade:**

<http://commonsensemedia.org/common-sense-family-media-agreement-grades-6-8>

**High School:**

<http://commonsensemedia.org/common-sense-family-media-agreement-high-school>

### **Foster Care and Social Media Questions**

Many foster parents have asked if there are any specific things that they should know about social media, networking and texting. While these topics are not specifically written in the *Wisconsin Foster Care Handbook* or *Chapter 56 Foster Home Care for Children*, there are a few basic principles that foster families should apply. Here are a few frequently asked questions:

*How should I maintain confidentiality about the youth placed in my home on social networking websites like Facebook?*

As a licensed foster parent, you must always maintain confidentiality about any youth placed in your home and their family. This means that pictures and any information about the youth placed in your home and their family should never be posted or written anywhere others have access to that information. This is especially important online for social media and social networking sites like Facebook.



(For more about confidentiality, refer to the *Wisconsin Foster Parent Handbook* in Chapter 2, page 8 at: <http://wifostercareandadoption.org/library/511/chapter2.pdf>.)

*If a youth in care owns a cell phone and/or portable gaming device before they came to my home, can they use those items all the time in my home?*

If a youth owns something like a cell phone or handheld gaming device, those items belong to the youth and may not be damaged or destroyed.

The *Wisconsin Foster Parent Handbook* (<http://wifostercareandadoption.org/library/512/chapter3.pdf>)

says, "If foster parents have concerns about a child's choice in music, clothing or other recreational or personal items, they should discuss the situation with the child's caseworker."

*Are youth in care allowed to have e-mail, Facebook accounts, blogs or YouTube accounts?*

Yes, youth in care are able to have online

accounts as long as they meet the minimum guidelines for the website. However, foster parents don't have to provide accessibility to the internet in their home. Many parents have opted to set up specific rules and guidelines about internet access for youth in their home.

*A youth placed in my home is posting pictures and information about himself on a social networking website. Is this allowed?*

Yes, youth in care are allowed to post pictures and information about themselves anywhere and

anytime they want. Youth in care do not have to follow the confidentiality guidelines that licensed foster parents need to, **except when it pertains to other youth in care in the home.**

*Am I allowed to develop or use a "Family Internet Safety Agreement" as a foster parent?* Yes! Parents need to stay educated about social media and have some household rules or guidelines for family members. Ideally, members of the youth's team will be part of the agreement, so that everyone is clear about what's allowed and what isn't.

### **The Advantages of Social Technology**

Social technology has provided many of us the ability to be more connected to each other than ever before. For most of our youth, this technology has become a part of their daily culture, and social media plays a big role in their life as they learn how to develop relationships and their identity.

Johnnie says, "When my niece got into some mischief while on *CrossFire*, my gut reaction was to restrict *all* internet and cell phone use. But her social skills aren't very good, and I actually found myself *encouraging* her to go on *Facebook* so that she could be 'friends' with the people at school and not be so isolated. They tend to ignore her at school, but *Facebook* is a kinder environment in some respects."

Johnnie goes on to say that she was able to use the *CrossFire* incident as a "teachable moment."

Some foster parents say a surprising bonus is being able to connect with their kids' birth parents. "It's been great!" says one parent. "They didn't respond to voice mail and emails,

### **Popular Social Media Websites**

#### **Adoption Resources of Wisconsin**

<http://wiadopt.org> is on *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *LinkedIn* and *Adoption Voices*.

#### **Foster Care Central**

<http://fostercarecentral.org/> is a social networking site like *Facebook* that supports foster parents, social workers and volunteers.

#### **FosterClub**

<http://www.fosterclub.com/>

is devoted to youth in care and alumni. It has message boards, blogs and networking opportunities with other youth in care.

#### **Foster Care Alumni of America (FCAA)**

<http://www.fostercarealumni.org/>

provides users a message board and blogs.

#### **Adoption.com**

<http://www.adoption.com/> offers support to its users with many available message boards.

#### **Grandsplace**

<http://grandsplace.org/>

offers support for relative caregivers with available live chats, message boards and an e-mail list.

but they always text me right back. I use AOL's instant messenger for my computer to text their phones, and I get the texts back on my computer."

Even though we adults may not "get it," the technology available today will be the building blocks for future applications and social media interfaces.



# *Heroes in Adoption*

## **Jennifer Stagg, Wednesday's Child Anchor**

### **KSL Channel 5**



*"I feel truly honored to share the stories of each Wednesday's Child with our viewers. Every child is unique, yet the common thread is poignant—they're all looking for a permanent family to share their lives with. I love the moment during our shoots with each child where they let their guard down, forget why we're there, and just let themselves be kids; something many of them haven't had an opportunity to be.*

*KSL is excited to be a part of their journey toward adoption."*

### **KSL and The Adoption Exchange have partnered together to stop the waiting...**

KSL has a passion for kids and has teamed up with The Adoption Exchange to feature **Wednesday's Child** in Utah.

Watch **KSL Channel 5 every 1st and 3rd Wednesday** during the news to see feature stories on waiting children, success stories of local adoptive families and adoption interest stories.

KSL talent, Jennifer Stagg and Mary Richards, will help highlight the personalities of the children by participating with them in some of their favorite activities.

Log onto **[www.ksl.com](http://www.ksl.com)** to view past Wednesday's Child stories.

CELEBRATE NATIONAL  
ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH  
WITH



SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2011  
11:00AM — 2:00 PM

# Boondocks Fun Center

75 South Fork Drive  
Draper, Utah

525 South Deseret Drive  
Kaysville, Utah

Cost: \$5.00 per adult (ages 18 and up) \$3.00 for children  
Pre-registration is mandatory

Registration is required. Deadline October 24th  
Register at [www.regonline.com/UACadoptionparty2011](http://www.regonline.com/UACadoptionparty2011)

Chili provided by  
Wendy's

ENJOY UNLIMITED MINIATURE GOLF  
10 ARCADE TOKENS AND  
1 PASS VALID TO CHOOSE FROM THE  
FOLLOWING ATTRACTIONS  
GO KARTS, SLICK TRACK, ROOKIE  
GO-KARTS, ROCK WALL, LASER TAG OR MAX-  
FLIGHT ROLLER COASTER SIMULATOR.



*“This is why I chose Foster Care”*  
**Our story of becoming a forever family**

By: Melissa Ritz, adoptive parent

\*Pictures drawn by Anastasia and Ryan Ritz. <sup>14</sup>

"Good morning, Sweetie. Did you have good dreams?" "Mmm...hmm..." she mutters, as she groggily wipes the sleep from her eyes. Lately, her anxiety about her past life with her birth-family has been resurfacing in her dreams. This is the first time I've heard about good dreams in weeks, so I ask her, "What was your good dream about?" "A loving mommy and daddy...just like our family." My heart melts...

*this is why I chose Foster Care.*

Like all adoptive parents, the path travelled to reach our children was long, and it was winding. It was full of pills, procedures, and pain. It was heart-wrenching, and it was heart-numbing. My empty arms ached to cradle my child, and I didn't know where to find him. During this time, I had no idea that less than five miles away, my children were alive, and were living the kind of life I could never bear to imagine.

It had been clear for some time that adoption was the right way for us to build our family. We had always wanted to provide foster care...someday. So, we explored every adoption option we could, and started getting serious about a few of them, but could never fully commit. Somewhere inside, we knew our hearts were made for the grueling task (and overwhelming joy) of foster care.

The phone rang on a Thursday afternoon, and I became a mother. Just like that. I couldn't wrap my head around it at all! I called my mom, and said, "I'm going to be a mom?" (It was more of a question than a statement.) Two hours later, I met my five year-old daughter, Anastaysia, and my two year-old son, Ryan. I remember sitting across the room from their foster parents, trying to get to know our children and the people who cared for and loved them for so long. The kids showed us every trick they knew, and Anastaysia took a picture of my husband and me holding Ryan in his little footie pajamas. The picture was out of focus, dim, and my wiggly son was half a blur. But that picture is priceless to me. It was taken in my first moments of motherhood.



No one could have fully prepared me for the adventure I've been on since our family came to be. I did the trauma research, I took the parenting classes, I knew what I was getting myself into. Yet, the first four-hour rage session I endured with my son still exhausted me. The first "I hate you!" still stung me. The first pain-filled wail I heard when I knew I was finally being "let in" still brought me to my knees beside my daughter.

And then...I hear my son singing his two favorite songs as one while he plays with his trucks. "...My life is a gift! My

life has a plan! My life has a purpose! And every little thing is gonna be alright!" In that moment, the strife is forgotten. My soul sings...*this is why I chose Foster Care.*





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