

NATIONAL adoption month



NATIONAL ADOPTION AWARENESS DAY

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2011, 11AM - 6PM
NORTH STEPS OF THE STATE CAPITOL

CALLING OUT OF NAMES AND ADOPTION AGENCY FAIR **11AM**
ADOPTION ORIENTATION (INSIDE THE STATE CAPITOL ROOM 113) **4:45PM**
CANDLELIGHT VIGIL **6PM**

There are over 3,400 children and youth living in foster care in the greater Sacramento region*. Over a thousand of them need families today!

*Number reflects a 12-county region: Amador, Butte, El Dorado, Nevada, Placer, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Sierra, Solano, Sutter, Yolo, and Yuba.

DEAR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS IN THE COMMUNITY,

Do you believe every child deserves a lifelong family? We do!

November is National Adoption Month. Throughout the month of November, the country will celebrate National Adoption Month. In recognition of the month, EMQ FamiliesFirst, Lilliput Children's Services and Sierra Forever Families, along with the National Adoption Month coalition, will join forces to highlight our community's successes as well as the continued need for all of our children to live in a safe and loving home.

Collectively, our agencies worked with the community and found permanent families for more than 500 children and youth in the greater Sacramento region* last year. David and Ruby are an example of the difference you can make when relatives are not available to care for children. Adopted at ages 5 and 6 by two loving parents after living with no parental supervision and homelessness, David and Ruby are happy and thriving in a nurturing and permanent family.

While we honor our successful adoptive families, we will not rest until every child in our community has a secure family. Right now, there are more than 1,000 children living in foster care in the greater Sacramento region who are available for adoption and urgently need a permanent family connection. Children, like 6-year-old Isaiah, who has been living in foster care for nearly three years, are waiting for a life-long family to adopt them.

Youth are far more likely to succeed with family ties. More children enter foster care every year than leave the system. Tragically, within California, thousands of children available for adoption turn 18 and leave the system without families each year. In the greater Sacramento region, over 500 youth aged out of foster care in 2010. The odds are stacked against those who emancipate with no permanent family. Facing adulthood on their own, it is likely that within two to four years over 50 percent of these young adults will be homeless, addicted to drugs, in prison or dead. Our children deserve more!

There are many ways that you can help, including mentoring, volunteering or making a financial contribution. What we need first and foremost, however, are adoptive families! We are looking for you to come forward and make a lifetime impact on a child through adoption. Every child deserves a family to call their own.

We urge you to help us strengthen our community. One family at a time.

Thankfully,

Bob Herne
Bob Herne

Sierra
FOREVERFAMILIES

916-368-5114
sierraff.org

Andree M. Abrahams
Andrees Abrahams



EMQ FamiliesFirst

1-877-488-5437
familiesfirstinc.org

Karen E. Alvord
Karen Alvord

Lilliput
Children's Services
916-923-5444

“DO YOU
BELIEVE
EVERY CHILD
DESERVES
A LIFELONG
FAMILY?
WE DO!”



Dispelling the myths of Adoption through Foster Care

MYTH: Adoption through foster care is expensive.

REALITY: Foster adoption is virtually free.

MYTH: The birth parents can take the children back.

REALITY: Once parental rights are terminated, the parents have no further recourse for gaining custody of the children.

MYTH: Children enter foster care because of juvenile delinquency.

REALITY: Children enter foster care through no fault of their own, usually as victims of neglect, abandonment or abuse.

MYTH: Information about the child's history is withheld in order to get the child placed with a family.

REALITY: All agencies are legally required to provide known information about the children to potential parents.

MYTH: Only the stereotypical "traditional" family can adopt.

REALITY: Adoptive families can include: same-sex couples, single parents, senior or disabled individuals, and multi-cultural families.

MYTH: Only infants are in need of being adopted, not teens.

REALITY: Nearly 70% of Sacramento County's foster children are 6 years and older. Many of these children are in need of adoption.

MYTH: Adoptive families are "on their own" after adoption is finalized.

REALITY: Post-adoption services, including clinical services, support groups and financial assistance (Adoption Assistance Program) are available to families.

MYTH: Only people with a "perfect" history can adopt.

REALITY: Sometimes, a parents' previous life experience can be their best gift to a child. Perfection is not an expectation.

MYTH: There is too much "red tape" and bureaucracy involved in adopting a child from foster care.

REALITY: Congress has streamlined the foster care adoption process through the Safe Families Act of 1997. Children that are not reunited with their birth parents are matched with permanent adoptive families as efficiently as possible.



PHOTO BY GREG POND PHOTOGRAPHY

DON AND CINDY: CHILDREN KEEP US YOUNG BY ANNA BARELA

Raising two adopted daughters keeps Don and Cindy Morris feeling young. Although Don admits being mistaken for the girls' grandfather on occasion, adopting Kaitlyn and Abbygale has changed the 50-something couple's lives for the better.

Don and Cindy have been married for 16 years and share a successful law practice. They never envisioned having children. However, the need for adoptive parents of foster children right here in Sacramento began to tug at their heartstrings. A Place Called Home, a segment on Fox40 television, planted the seed. One particular story solidified their desire to adopt.

"It was the spirit moving," Don said. "We felt touched by the needs of kids in foster care needing families. We had the ability to provide that for kids."

The couple chose a local agency to help them build a family. Within a year, they were approved as a foster/adoptive family, also known as a "resource family," and three months later they were introduced to 9-year-old Kaitlyn and her 5-year-old sister Abbygale. Don and Cindy knew they wanted to adopt siblings because they both grew up in large families.

Kaitlyn and Abbygale had been placed into protective custody due to concern for their health and welfare in the home of their birth parents. Don and Cindy began visiting Kaitlyn and Abbygale with the intention of adopting both girls, bringing them into their home in June of 2007. Adoption plans were put on hold, though, when the county opted to work toward reuniting the girls with their birth family.

Although Don and Cindy felt like they were on an emotional rollercoaster during this time of uncertainty, their goal remained to do what was best for the girls.

They facilitated visitation with the birth family and maintained the girls' school, community and church activities. In 2009, the county finally determined adoption was, in fact, in the best interests of the girls.

Once Kaitlyn and Abbygale were officially available for adoption, Don and Cindy quickly progressed through adoptive placement. In September, their adoption was finalized, and they became the proud parents of Kaitlyn and Abbygale.

Contact with the birth family has remained. The couple leaves it up to the girls how often they want to visit. Sadly, the various health problems of the girls' birth mother took her life in 2010. The entire Morris family attended the memorial, and the girls met many of their extended family, including biological aunts and uncles.

Don and Cindy feel blessed with their beautiful family.

"BIRTH CHILD VERSUS ADOPTIVE CHILD – I DON'T THINK IN THOSE TERMS. THEY ARE JUST MY CHILDREN."

The once-shy and reserved girls are now blossoming. Kaitlyn works hard in school and is passionate about singing. Abbygale joined Brownies and

loves every minute. Both girls are active in sports and just earned their red belts in karate. Most of all, the girls keep Don and Cindy feeling young.

"One of the things that will keep you young is going on a field trip to the pumpkin patch!" Don said.

Don and Cindy appreciate continued support from the agency and attend a monthly adoptive parent support group. The road to permanency was a long journey for everyone involved.

"It didn't take long for me to love them and accept them as my own," Don said. "Even before it was clear they were going to stay. Birth child versus adoptive child – I don't think in those terms. They are just my children. They have a strong, loving bond with both of us."

DEBBIE DOUGLAS: CALLING ME MOM

BY ANNA BARELA

When her birth parents permanently lost parental rights, 12-year-old Airasheli looked at her foster mom and said, “What’s going to happen to me?”

Debbie Douglas was Airasheli’s foster mom, along with many other children, for a few years. When she heard those words, her heart melted. She knew she would never let Airasheli go and immediately worked to begin the adoption process.

Fostering is a family tradition for Debbie – her mother cared for foster children, as did her sister, niece, nephew and aunt. After raising two biological children, surviving cancer and retiring from the county to work for Sutter Center for Psychiatry, she opened her home to foster children. As a single mom, she finds joy in a house full of family.

“I just felt like I had a place and time for more kids,” Debbie said. “My oldest one is 36 and my baby is 33. Now my new baby is 12.”

Debbie remembers the first day she brought Airasheli home. Upon meeting, the 9-year-old with dyed blond streaks through her bouncy curls, wished to interview Debbie to see if she wanted to stay with her. Debbie thought, “Oh no, this one is going to be a handful.”

But she wasn’t. From day one, Airasheli was polite with no behavioral problems despite being left to do

whatever she wanted under the care of her birth family. She also enjoyed helping with the small children.

“She’s always been a caretaker,” Debbie said. “I think she was a little bit too grown for her time because she had to be. She was the adult factor in her own life. Sometimes I would have to say, ‘Come back down to 12, Baby. It’s okay to be a kid.’ But it wound up being an asset for her because she is able to do a lot for herself.”

AS A SINGLE MOM, DEBBIE FINDS JOY IN A HOUSE FULL OF FAMILY.

Today Airasheli loves shopping, fashion and cooking, although Debbie is protective in the kitchen since one burned food incident. She gets good grades, plays piano, sings, dances and plays basketball. The transition to permanency was seamless for Airasheli because she was already home.

“We already had the bond going,” Debbie said. “We had spent years together, put in some time and put in some work.”

Airasheli said, “It’s better to know that I am in a more structured environment. While I was with my mom I could do what I wanted, but if you’re more structured it makes you a better person.”

For Debbie, the adoption process progressed quickly and smoothly, with a financial cost of nearly zero. And, as far as Airasheli being an “older child” by adoption standards, Debbie sees it as a plus and doesn’t understand popular obsession with younger adoptions. She enjoys working with children who are set in their personalities and have a certain level of independence.

Debbie’s biological children are very supportive. Airasheli is close with all six grandchildren, especially the grandson whose birthday is a day apart from hers. Debbie looks forward to hosting the entire family for Thanksgiving this year. She is taking a break from caring for other foster children while she and Airasheli bond in the new dynamic of their relationship.

“Seeing that face daily, hearing her call me ‘Mom,’ is worth it,” Debbie said. “She’s a cutie in many ways.”



PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

Have you considered adoption?

*Have you considered
adopting through foster care?*

You may be a good candidate if:

- You have a strong sense of commitment
- You believe in the importance of family connection
- You love children and parenting
- You have a good sense of humor
- You are resilient and can “go with the flow”
- You are responsible and mature

If this sounds like you, please join us on Thursday, November 3, for an Adoption Orientation inside the State Capitol Building in conference room 113.

This intimate and unique orientation is co-hosted by EMQ FamiliesFirst, Lilliput Children’s Services and Sierra Forever Families. The Capitol Heart Gallery of Sacramento – a display of beautifully taken photographs of children awaiting permanent families – is featured in the State Capitol November 1-14.

Event information is available at:
www.nationaladoptionday.org/events/california

For more information
about ongoing adoption orientations, please visit:
www.familiesfirstinc.org
www.lilliput.org
www.sierraff.org

