



Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections

WINTER 2014

ISSUE 35

APAC is a collaborative effort between Children's Aid Society and the Alabama Department of Human Resources to provide education and supportive services to strengthen and empower Alabama's adoptive families.

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The Voice of Adoption

When I started considering adoption a decade ago, several of my friends had already adopted internationally or domestically through private agencies. But I knew that wasn't for me. From experiences I'd had as a young adult, I knew I wanted to pursue adoption through the foster care system.

I wasn't naive. By choosing to foster to adopt through the Alabama Department of Human Resources, I knew it was unlikely I would get an infant, but that was not

important to me. I also knew children in the foster system would have histories (or some would say baggage) and they do, some more than others depending on their age and circumstances.

By fostering first, versus jumping straight into adoption, it was also my way of putting my toe in the water. Of course, as with any adoption path, the qualification process - the classes, home study and background checks - took some time. Then the first child I fostered was not available for adoption. The second one wasn't either. Nor the third. I was getting impatient.

Through these children, however, I was learning about my capacity to parent. They left a lasting impression on me, and I hope I had a positive impact on them.

In fact, I still see my first child and her family eight years after she left foster care. Yet, in spite of these positive experiences, I sometimes felt my forever child would never come.

While I was a foster parent, I started attending APAC meetings to get my required continuing education credits. I listened to the stories of other adoptive parents, their struggles, issues and journeys.

As a prospective adoptive parent, I came to realize that the adoption process, no matter what route you take, requires a great amount of patience, faith and emotional fortitude. It is true, as many told me, the right child will find you. Mine finally did.

We celebrated our third family day November 17.

- Meredith Portman,
Adoptive Parent



"...the right child will find you."

"adoption... requires a great amount of **patience**, **faith** and **emotional fortitude**"

Note from the Director

Voice of
Adoption

Happy New Year! I hope your holidays were joyful!

Each quarter the APAC program staff draft this newsletter for adoptive family members and other stakeholders, in hopes of providing information and support that will strengthen and empower adoptive families. Staff spend time researching and writing articles focused on the challenges of adoption and options for managing those challenges. However, we understand that oftentimes those having already traveled a road may be in the best position to provide support for others traveling that same path. Adopted youth and experienced adoptive family members have a story to tell. Their voices can make a difference for others. This newsletter is devoted to hearing and understanding the voices of adopted children and families. We think you will be interested, intrigued, and inspired! I hope so!

If you are an adoptive parent and wish to be connected to another adoptive parent for sharing and support, please let us know by calling or emailing your APAC regional office staff, or by calling our toll-free number (1-866-803-2722) or emailing us at www.childrensaid.org/apac.

If you are an adoptive parent and have an adopted child between the ages of 9-18, consider registering your child(ren) for Camp APAC, which is set for June 17-20. Priority is given to camper families adopting through DHR. Refer to Camp APAC information included in this newsletter and register your child(ren) now!

One more note - Dr. Wayne Deuhn will be in Alabama in February and March to provide training on Sexual Safety in Adoptive and Foster Placements. This "Trained Therapist Network" event is a free all day training to educate professionals who work with foster and adopted children. Adoptive families are also invited to attend. See postings in this newsletter for cities and dates of these trainings.

We look forward to this year together!

- Debra Hawk Finley, LCSW, PIP
APAC Program Director

Throughout this newsletter you will find information relating to the voice of adoptive families and the importance of validating that voice. You will hear from adoptive parents, professionals and online bloggers around the state. We hope you hear the sound of your own voice within these next few pages...

- Kai Mumpfield, LCSW
APAC Regional Coordinator

Mark your calendars!

Permanency Conference

April 30 - May 2, 2014

Birmingham, AL

Registration will open online in February 2014
www.childrensaid.org



Finding the Voice of Validation

Nothing is quite as fulfilling as opening the door to a local coffee spot, and sitting down to a nice conversation with a friend. We share our joys, our tears, our happiness and fears. Crowded calendars can prevent us from taking those much needed pauses. With modern technology, sweet life exchange can be found online through the blog world. One specific group has caught our attention recently, the Adoptive Parent Bloggers.

If you are new to blogs and blogging, it's kind of like an online journal or story book. Stories are shared, and photos are posted, and we are invited to join in and follow along in the journey. It's a great outlet for many families to be able to express their highs and lows through the adoption process, and the forever family adventure. It's also a great way for families who are considering the process to read along and gain understanding of what other families are experiencing. One of the greatest benefits of reading blogs is the overwhelming understanding that you are not alone in your journey, as you discover that families just like yourself are experiencing the same thing. There are many Adoptive parents in Alabama who are blogging and sharing their story. Here's a few validating voices from both bloggers and Adoptive Parents:

- "Some people say that all children need to heal is love and that's true IF love means that you are willing to adjust the way you interact with them to meet their unique needs." - Adoptive Parent
- "When she looks in the mirror, we want our daughter to know herself. It's hard to face the world when you don't know where your face came from." - Adoptive Parent Blogger
- "Nonetheless, I have little credibility in the mom conversation, so I ask his 9-year-old sister to give it a shot. She turns around in her seat and looks at him, 'A mom is the person who raises you and takes care of you and disciplines you. A mom feeds you and pays for things. A mom is there for you. Our mom is the one that gave birth to us. But Nanna is the one who does everything a mom does. When I was your

age, I called her Nanna just like you. But I don't call her Nanna anymore. I call her mom'." - Adoptive Parent Blogger

- "She wasn't tracking down her father to learn more about him. She was tracking him down to learn more about herself." - Adoptive Parent Blog

"Bloggers bring a breath of fresh air, and renewed hope knowing you are not alone."

- "I could read all the books in the library about orphanages, and would still never know what it was like to actually be in an orphanage. Being an adoptive parent to children who were once in an orphanage (or in care,) takes patience- a lot of patience!" - Adoptive Mom

- "My son's birth story is also my birth story, because I became a mom when he was born. He made me a mother, his mommy. The time I spent deciding to adopt was a walk in the park compared

to actually doing it. Adoption is an intrusive, time consuming and expensive process. You give strangers access to the most intimate details of your life. You share your thoughts, feelings, beliefs and allow access to your bedroom closets. LOL! You open your heart to disappointment and near misses that bring you to your knees and break your heart. I thought as a counselor/a professional, I would know what to expect. I knew all the "educated" answers. I was prepared to guide my son, my husband and I through the long journey, to perfectly navigate the ups and downs. However, I found out in the end, I didn't need all the right answers ; all I needed was to be his mom.!" - Professional/Adoptive Parent

- Hannah Taylor

APAC Family Support Worker III

- Jennifer Hudson

Administrative Specialist

"Things I Know About Parenting a Difficult Child"

1. You can't always make it better, but you can always make it worse. // 2. Progress is measured relative to where you were, not relative to where others are. // 3. What people think only matters if it helps you become a better parent. // 4. Reinforcing the positive works way better than punishing the negative. // 5. When you're overwhelmed, clean the bathroom. // 6. When your child pushes your buttons, you need to take a good look at your buttons. // 7. Yes, you are working harder than other mothers. // 8. You must, must, must put on your own oxygen mask first. // 9. It's worse to be the disliked, flawed, not-understood, yelled-at child than to be the frustrated adult. //
10. We are stronger than we think.

- Julia Attaway - www.lotsalaundry.blogspot.com

***Quotes are featured from local adoptive families, professionals and these online adoptive parent bloggers:**

<http://www.theroses3.blogspot.com/>
<http://open.adoptionblogs.com/weblogs>
<http://everykidahome.blogspot.com>

Leveraging Psychotropic Medications for Children

In August and September, APAC sponsored a series of statewide trainings for helping professionals who serve foster and adoptive families on the topic of “Leveraging Psychotropic Medication for Children.” Led by Dr. Brent Wilson, this event was a wonderful success and there were close to 500 professionals trained over the course of four days. Dr. Wilson, founder of Child Welfare Collaborative (CWC), is a child and adolescent psychiatrist whose expertise and passion consists of educating and aiding state and private agencies who serve underprivileged children. He currently consults for DHR about medication use amongst Alabama’s foster children and discussed how prevalent psychotropic medication use is in Alabama. Dr. Wilson is a great voice for children by simplifying the complex and confusing maze of diagnoses and medications as well as empowering professionals and families to advocate for children in more effective ways.

Please find a few of the highlights from our time together to help you have a *greater voice* for your children and your family’s needs.

♦What is a Psychiatric Diagnosis?

A label that identifies a set of behaviors or symptoms as related to one another that impairs normal functioning.

It is a *description* of symptoms and not the *explanation* for symptoms.

♦What are Psychotropic Medications?

Medications that act on the central nervous system and can affect cognition, emotions, and behavior.

Psychotropic medications are prescribed specifically for psychiatric illness/mental health disorders and can be prescribed by any physician.

♦Foster youth experience psychiatric diagnosis at rates higher than non-foster youth.

Youth in foster care are more likely to have a mental health diagnosis than other youth. In a study of foster youth ages 14-17, 63% met the criteria for at least one mental health diagnosis at some point in their life.

Most common diagnoses among foster youth: Oppositional Defiant Disorder/Conduct Disorder, Major Depressive Disorder/Major Depressive Episode, ADHD, and PTSD.

♦Impact of Trauma

Many children with trauma histories have symptoms that mimic other psychiatric disorders so this needs to be carefully assessed.

Common trauma symptoms include the following: sleep problems, hyperactivity, restlessness, agitation, poor concentration, non-suicidal self-injury, anxiety, hallucinations, substance use.

♦How do I advocate and what questions do I ask?

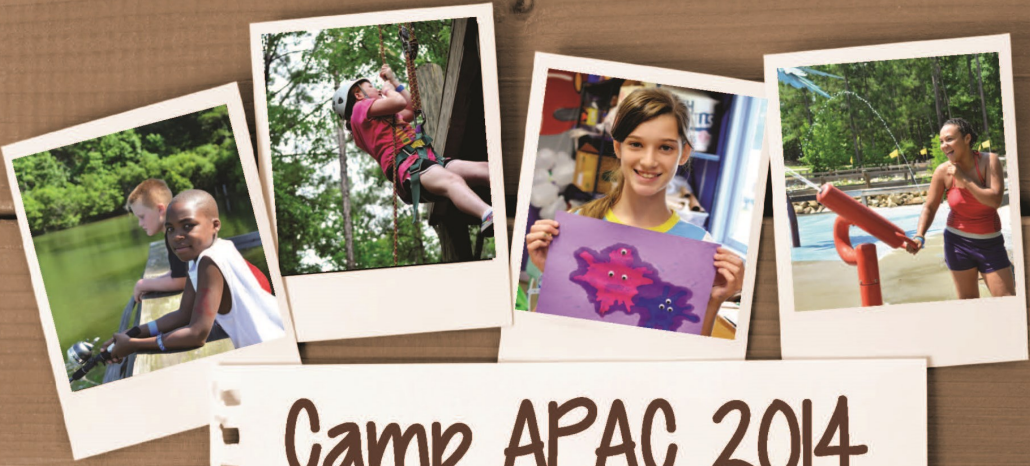
Be sure you fully understand the psychiatrist’s recommendation for treatment and ask any questions that will provide you with more clarity.

If medication is recommended, be sure you understand its purpose, risks and benefits, and how the child should be monitored for improvement and side effects.

For questions related to treatment recommendations including medications, please contact your regional APAC counselor or visit the CWC at www.childwelfare.co to find additional resources for families and professionals.

- John Douglass, LPC
APAC Family Counselor

- Brock Sellers, LCSW
Trained Therapist Network Coordinator




Camp APAC 2014

June 17-20

Join us for 4 days of fun, excitement and outdoor adventure designed for adopted kids ages 9 to 18, along with their siblings!

NEW Camp Site!
Camp Chandler
Wetumpka, AL



CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY

www.childrensaid.org/campapac

Change a Life Through Adoption
Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections
866-4-AL-KIDS www.childrensaid.org

Upcoming GPS Dates:
 Birmingham Classes Begin - **January 13** and **March 31**
 Huntsville Classes Begin - **January 13**
 Dothan Classes Begin - **April 8**

*Pre-Adoption Services needs your help recruiting families for Alabama's "Waiting Children".
 If you would be willing to partner with us please contact us.*



We Equip You Where You Are!

No need to leave your home or office!
If you have internet access, you can join our live webinars
and receive Social Work, Counseling, and
Foster Parent continuing education credits!



- **January:** Child Development: What Are We Missing
- **February:** Transracial Placements
- **March:** Grief and Loss in Foster and Adoptive Parents

*View our
webinars
on your
smartphone
or tablet!*

** For further details and registration information, go to www.childrensaid.org.**

Adoptive Family Groups

APAC offers support groups that meet throughout the state,
providing education and social interaction for adoptive parents and their children.

Northern Region

Calhoun County-2nd Thursday
6:30-8pm @ Greenbrier Church of Christ, Anniston
DeKalb County-4th Tuesday
6-7:30pm @ Fellowship Christian Center, Rainsville
Etowah County-3rd Monday
6-7:30pm @ Christ Central United Methodist, Rainbow City
Jefferson County East-1st Thursday
6-7:30pm @ Huffman United Methodist, Birmingham
Jefferson County Multi-Cultural-2nd Tuesday
6:30-8pm @ Bluff Park United Methodist, Birmingham
Jefferson County West-4th Thursday
6:30-8pm @ Pleasant Hill United Methodist, Bessemer
Lauderdale County-1st Tuesday
6-7:30pm @ Cross Pointe COC (ED Bldg), Florence
Madison County-2nd Monday
6-7:30pm @ First United Methodist, Huntsville
Morgan County-2nd Tuesday
6-7:30pm @ Calvary Assembly Church, Decatur
Shelby County-1st Tuesday
6:30-8pm @ First United Methodist, Alabaster

Southern Region

Autauga/Elmore County-4th Tuesday
6-7:30pm @ Glynwood Baptist Church, Prattville
Barbour County-3rd Monday
5:30-7pm @ First United Methodist, Eufaula
Henry County-1st Tuesday
6-7:30pm @ Headland First Baptist, Headland
Houston County-1st Monday
6:30-8:00 @ First United Methodist, Dothan
Geneva County-1st Monday
6:30-8pm @ Trinity Baptist, Geneva
Lee County-1st Thursday
6-7:30pm @ The Big House Foundation, Opelika, AL
Montgomery County-3rd Thursday
6-7:30pm @ Frazer United Methodist, Montgomery
Baldwin County-3rd Thursday
6-7:30pm @ Eastern Shore Church of Christ, Daphne
Mobile County-4th Friday
6-7:30pm @ Regency Church of Christ, Mobile

All groups have parent sessions,
child groups, and childcare
unless otherwise indicated.



APAC Library

www.childrensaid.org/apaclibrary

In Their Own Voices

Simon, Rita J.

Note: This is not the actual book cover.

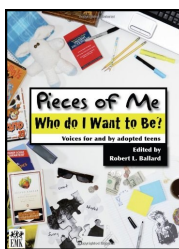
In Their Own Voice. How did being adopted transracially affect their lives through childhood and into adulthood? How did their family experiences influence their racial and social identities, their choice of friends and marital partners, and

IN THEIR SIBLINGS' VOICES

When Two Adopted Siblings Talk About Their Experiences Growing Up with Black and Biracial Brothers and Sisters

RITA J. SIMON
BRONWYN M. BOWEN

In Their Siblings' Voice. The stories of twenty white non-adopted siblings who grew up with black or biracial brothers and sisters in the late 1960s and 1970s. Belonging to the same families, these siblings offer their perspectives on the multiracial adoption experience, which, for them, played out against the backdrop of two tumultuous, politically charged decades. *In Their Siblings' Voices* helps readers fully grasp the dynamic of living in a multiracial household and its effect on friends, school, and community.



Pieces of Me: Who Do I Want to Be?

A collection of stories, poems, art, music, quotes, activities, provocative questions, and more—all for the young adopted person who wants to figure out his or her story but doesn't know where to begin. It is a book of voices, from ages 11 to 63, speaking honestly and authentically about what it means to be adopted. Most are adoptees from around the world—some are transracial, some are international, some are from foster care, some are young, some are old. There are a few adoptive parents, birth parents, and professionals who share themselves in here as well.

Creating Sexual Safety in Adoption & Foster Care



Free Training



Wayne D. Duehn, PhD
Professor Emeritus
School of Social Work
The University of Texas at Arlington

This training will develop professionals who can teach the skills and techniques required to parent a child victim of sexual abuse and develop foster/adoptive parents who are proficient in these parenting skills. When such skills are learned, knowing parents can make the most crucial difference for a child recovering from the trauma of sexual abuse.

February 12: Huntsville
March 13: Mobile

February 13: Birmingham
March 14: Montgomery

www.childrensaid.org

APAC is a collaborative effort between Children's Aid Society and the Department of Human Resources to provide education and support to Alabama's adoptive families.

counseling corner

It was a beautiful day out, so I decided to take my children to the playground. We were having a great time playing until my 2 year old son fell and scraped his knee. He was very upset and was in pain. As a mother seeing how much pain he was in, I wanted nothing more but to take that pain away. All I could do though, was hold him and whisper in his ears as he was crying, "Shh, it is ok, it's ok," over and over until he recovered from the pain. Wiping tears away I repeatedly said "I know that must of hurt baby, it will be ok."

It is hard for any person to see someone they love in pain. It is hard because we cannot take that pain away. In the story above, I couldn't make the scraped knee not happen. What I could do was comfort him and validate the pain he was experiencing.

That event is a very simplistic example of a source of trauma for a child. Children that are in foster care or have been adopted have an

ingrained sense of pain and trauma that has occurred before you became their parents. We want to be able to take away the pain they have experienced, the abuse, and the loss. Even though we can't erase those memories, we can comfort them and validate the experience.



Webster dictionary defines validate as "to check or prove the validity or accuracy of (something)." For adoptees, validation can take on another definition, which is to acknowledge, normalize, and feel heard. It is important to validate the adoptee's experience, to validate their loss, and to validate the abuse. Comments such as, "Wow, that must have been hard for you"; "I bet you really do miss them"; "I am sorry that has

happened to you, that must have been painful" are powerful comments coming from parents to start the healing process.

*-Jill Sexton, M.Ed, ALC
APAC Family Counselor*



***Get connected with an
Adoptive Family Mentor!
Call 1-866-803-2722***

"A mentor family offers a peer relationship to an adoptive family needing support."

From Our Family to Yours: *Questions you are asking, answered by an adoptive parent.*

Dear Adoptive Parent:

I have a child with some developmental delays, signs of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAE) and Autism Spectrum, and I keep hearing we have a long road ahead of us. Should we be worried? What should I be doing? How do I prepare? **Signed, "Help Me!"**

Dear "Help Me":

As parents of kids with these diagnoses, it can be very overwhelming and hard to absorb. There are tons of questions that no one has all the answers for and some days it seems like you are wading through muddied water alone but let me assure you, you are not. Here is what my husband and I have found that helps.

1. Realize that you do have a long road ahead of you. Most likely, you will be very involved with your child the rest of your life. That doesn't have to be a bad thing. It took us a very long time to accept that one thought. But as we have come to accept that, we are redefining what we thought was "family" and "support" for our children and feel more at peace with it.

2. What should you be doing? READ, READ, READ everything you can get your hands on, find out what resources are out there for now and for adulthood, and find a support system. We have found that APAC, our church and a few good friends and family that we trained to understand our sons, are the BEST thing to get through the journey of special needs.

3. How do you prepare? Well, the thing we are doing to prepare (we have two that are about to graduate high school) is asking around and reading up on what is available for our boys' futures. And most of all, take care of your marriage/other family relationships and yourself. You cannot be a good support to your child unless you are taking care of yourself.

Dear Adoptive Parent:

I have a 17 year old son and because of his diagnosis, I have been told he would not function well in the "real world" with a job. He wants to work and we want him to have that experience. Should we even pursue this? **Signed, "To Work or Not to Work"**

Dear "To Work or Not to Work:"

Yes, you should pursue it. We have found that the Department of Rehabilitation Services in your state is the best place to start. Get an appointment for you and your child and get that process started. Many young adults have gone to be successful in keeping a job because they were trained and were hired by businesses that understand special needs and mentor our kids! We did some research when our oldest turned 16 and found the local businesses that hired people with disabilities and now he is successful in his job. He has held this job for almost 2 years now. We are very proud of him and so grateful to the businesses in our area who train and take time to understand our boys' needs.

Dear Adoptive Parent:

I am a counselor and have had several adoptive families come across my path lately. Are there any resources, people or websites that you have come across, that you can share with me?

Signed, "Looking for Resources"

Dear "Looking for Resources":

Here are a few places that we have found very helpful in our journey:

Full Life Ahead Foundation, Birmingham
www.fulllifeahead.org

Alabama Pre and Post Adoption Connections www.childrensaid.org

Department of Rehab Services
www.rehab.alabama.gov

Department of Mental Health
www.mh.alabama.gov

NAMI Alabama (National Alliance of Mental Illnesses)
www.namialabama.org

- "Dear Adoptive Parent" answers were submitted by a seasoned Adoptive Parent, and APAC Adoptive Family Mentor.

Alabama's Waiting Children

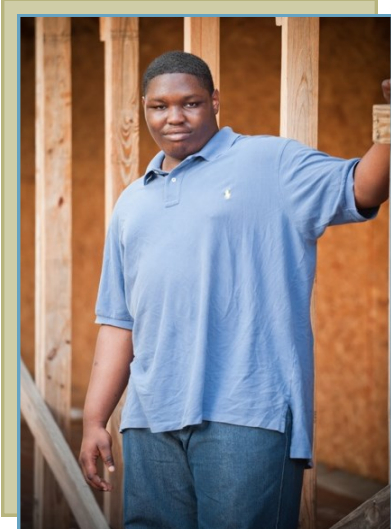
Zachary, born in February 1999, is a shy, respectful young man. He loves to play with action figures and cars.

Zachary loves being outside. He is very good at building objects out of paper and tape. He loves school, especially history and science. He receives special education service to help him with language, speech and organizational skills. Zachary has autism. His teachers describe him to be polite and friendly.

Edith, born in May 2000, is an outgoing, friendly girl with a beautiful smile.

She is very affectionate and charming with others. She likes to please others. She loves to read, draw and color. Edith does well in school. She is in regular classes and has a desire to do well. Her favorite subject is math. She is a favorite of her teachers. Edith responds well to the medication she takes for her anxiety and mood issues.

Heather, born in November 2001, is a shy, quiet young girl. When she becomes acquainted with others she is very happy and loving. Heather loves to ride her bike, swing and play ball. She really enjoys school. Her favorite subject is math. Heather receives special education to help in all subjects and with speech. She has several friends in school and is a favorite of all her teachers. Her speech is difficult to understand as she mumbles and does not pronounce words well. She is very shy with strangers. She is apprehensive about leaving her foster home and school.



Alex, born in October 1996, is an extremely intelligent young man. He enjoys reading and does math problems for fun. Alex wants a family that is active and likes doing things together. He loves Alabama football but has never had the opportunity to go to a game.

Alex is interested in possibly becoming a chef when he grows up. He likes to watch the Food Network cooking shows and tries to come up with his own recipes.

While Alex is above average academically he has problems socializing with his peers. Alex needs a family that will be able to devote a lot of time helping him understand social norms and improving his socialization skills. Alex understands what it means to be adopted and is looking for his forever family.



Visit www.heartgalleryalabama.com
to meet more kids waiting to be adopted or
to inquire about any of the kids you see here.



Endae, born September 2007 is a fun and energetic little boy. He enjoys coloring and playing with his toys. He enjoys being around other children but has to be reminded to play nicely. Endae has serious medical and behavioral needs and will need lifelong care. He is frequently hospitalized and has to attend numerous medical appointments. The perfect family for Endae would be a two-parent family with someone having experience in the medical field. This family will need to be structured but flexible and understanding of this child's many needs. Endae is a very special child with special needs who deserves to have a forever family.

Dustin, born in February 1999 is the oldest of this sibling group of three boys. He has an IEP in place for academics if needed. Dustin's grade are average and he maintains passing grades. Dustin enjoys watching TV, playing video games and reading. He likes the Harry Potter Books. He prefers the indoors and enjoys playing by himself. Dustin is physically healthy. He does wear glasses to help him see the black board in the classroom.

Rickey and Daniel are twins born in February 2003. They both like to play outside. They both enjoy watching TV, playing video games and playing with others. Both Rickey and Daniel have an open IEP for Special Education, if needed, for academics. Daniel receives services for a speech impediment. Rickey's grades in school are average. Daniel is a straight A student. The boys are both physically healthy. Daniel and Rickey are very energetic.



Shadrach and Shedricka (Diamond) are siblings who are strongly attached to one another. They have been in foster care for several years and are currently in a therapeutic foster home. They have an older brother to whom they are attached. He is currently in an adoptive placement. They have been able to maintain contact with him and it would be beneficial if they could continue to have contact, even if it is only by letters and/or phone calls.

Shedricka, born in May 2002 is the middle child. She has big, expressive eyes and a beautiful smile. Her favorite pastime is art. She enjoys art projects of all types but especially drawing. Shedricka doesn't like school but her grades are usually good and she is very bright. Shedricka struggles with authority but she can also be very sweet and loving and lots of fun. She is in a therapeutic foster home and both her therapeutic worker and her foster parent have been working with Shedricka to improve her behaviors and she seems to be making progress.

Shadrach, born October 2005, is very bright. He enjoys video games and could play them for hours. He craves attention and enjoys having someone read to him or play

with him. Shadrach is very attached to his sister but they do sometimes have arguments as most siblings do. Shadrach needs to participate in extracurricular activities that will have him playing outdoors.

This sibling group would benefit from a two-parent home with parents who would encourage and support the children's participation in sports and other activities.



CHILDREN'S AID
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