



Partners

The Newsletter For Wisconsin's Adoptive & Foster Families

A publication of the Coalition for Children, Youth & Families

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- 2 Adopting Beyond Age
- 3 Home to Stay:
Worth the Wait
- 4-5 Preparing to Adopt an
Older Child
- 6 Resources
- 7 Upcoming Events

Inside

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Dear Friends,

By now you've noticed something different about this communication from us. After long and careful consideration, we've changed our name to the *Coalition for Children, Youth & Families*.

We chose this name after a great deal of discussion as part of our strategic planning process because it is more inclusive and more reflective of all the populations that we serve. Not only do we serve as many foster children and families as adoptive children and families, we can see future needs of youth aging out of foster care, kinship care providers, birth families, and others for the type of support we currently provide.

Some of you with long memories will recognize that this new name is very similar to our original name in 1982, the *Coalition for Children in Families*. Back then, when the organization was brand new and we were creating brand-new programs that focused on the adoption of children waiting in foster care, no one was familiar with our organization. It was important then to change our name to something that more specifically described what we did – hence having adoption as part of our name. So we became the *Special Needs Adoption Network*. At that time, from the child welfare world, any child in foster care was considered to be “special needs.” But what we found out after we changed to this name was that most people who heard “special needs” thought we only worked with children in wheelchairs or with developmental challenges. So after a bit of time, we again changed to a new name – *Adoption Resources of Wisconsin*. Shortly after that new name, the Department of Children and Families awarded us the first contract for the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center.

Today we find ourselves in a very different position. We needed a name that welcomes children of all ages and families of all types. Although our mission still remains focused on children, youth, and families touched by foster care and adoption, we decided to omit both those terms from our name so that families in need of connections, support, and encouragement will not feel uncomfortable turning to us.

So we come full circle. We had, originally, a name that reflected a big organization when we were little and it was just me in my basement. Today, we work with counties, agencies, support groups, families, youth, and groups that work on the cause of permanence and stability for children and families. We have grown into the name that we had at the start of our journey. Our cause is the same – helping where we can to improve the lives of children and families. And we have loved each moment of this journey.

Thanks,

Colleen M. Ellingson
Chief Executive Officer

P.S. We have never forgotten that you have been our partners in this journey since 1984. Please help us celebrate our new name and let us know what you think.

Adopting Beyond Age



“People say teenagers don’t want to be adopted, that we’ll be 18 soon and won’t need a family. I need a family even more, now that I’m trying to get ready to be grown.”

– from the video, “We Interrupt: Waiting Teens Talk About Child Specific Recruitment,” funded by Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2003

Every year, hundreds of waiting children age out of foster care without a family or some kind of permanence. Prior to that, many of these youth have spent years bouncing around from one placement to the next, hoping that each move would be the last one.

Many waiting children are school-aged and older. In Wisconsin and across our nation, waiting children average about nine years old. It is knowledge that is often shared at initial information meetings that those wishing to build their families through the adoption of a child from the foster care system attend. And yet many families voice preferences with respect to age (usually ages younger than the average age of children waiting for permanence) and remain hopeful that they might be able to adopt children falling within the parameters they have set for themselves.

While there is nothing wrong in having preferences or parameters, when it comes to age, personal preference does limit the pool of waiting children available. In addition, as with any child of any age, there is also a risk of not being a good match. So, why not consider this challenge: eliminate age parameters and instead focus on shared/common interests to maximize your opportunities of being matched with a waiting child of any age group.

One major advantage to adopting a child, no matter his or her age, who shares common interests, is that, not only will they complement your interests, but also your life. If your common interests involve outdoor activities and sports, you may find yourself enjoying more activities together, such as camping trips or attending a gymnastics meet. Likewise, if your common interests involve quiet, quality family time, you may find yourself spending more time together at home enjoying a movie or playing a board game.

Shared interests can also be great conversation starters that can help you and your child get to know each other better and feel even more connected with one other. The sense of belonging or feeling “claimed” by their adoptive family is hugely important for many of our children who have spent a large portion of their life feeling quite the opposite, after multiple rejections and from having to start over each time they were moved to a new place.

This is a great time to recognize adoption as a wonderful, life-changing event that allows for the opportunity to change a child’s life and enrich the lives of immediate and extended family members of the adoptive family. This is an even better time to begin to implement the challenge to eliminate age and replace it with common interests as a factor when you consider building your family through adoption – if you haven’t already done so. Dare to understand the value behind this; that it isn’t only you who will benefit. So will a child, whether age seven, 13, or 17, who will not only share interests common to your own, but whose needs will also match the strengths of your family.

Home to Stay: Worth the Wait

On a recent Home to Stay™ visit, one of our Resource Specialists had what she describes as, “the privilege of meeting an amazing family with a huge heart and desire to help children in need of a family.” This amazing family doesn’t stop at the children, but shows their commitment to birth parents and relatives of their children, as well.

Kaia and Joel Beyer always wanted a large family. So, after their fourth child was born, they decided to become foster parents. They knew there was a need for foster parents in the state and believe that all children deserve to know that they are loved and wanted. The Beyer family has shown a great commitment to the children who have come to live with them over time. They still remain in contact with one of the girls they have fostered, as well as with her grandmother, who is now raising her. They also have an “open door policy” of sorts: any child who comes to live with them is more than welcome to stay as long as they want or need.

Kaia and Joel welcomed Luke into their home when he was three months old and he was adopted at age three-and-a-half. They met Max the day he was born, brought him home from the hospital when he was two days old, and finalized his adoption when he was almost two. As Kaia said, they had “fallen in love with them both right away,” as did their extended family. Even though the family had a long wait while moving through the various legal processes, they say both boys were definitely worth the wait. In Kaia’s words, “They were the missing pieces of our family puzzle.”

Perhaps what was most surprising to this family was the love and compassion they have developed for the birth parents of the children who have stayed with them over time. Kaia and Joel didn’t expect to have that much of a connection with them, and they often think about how easy it would have been for their family to be one of the families in need of the care they are currently providing. Kaia believes that, “just because they (the birth parents of the children in her care) can’t raise their children doesn’t mean they aren’t good people.” But the sentiment is more than just words; the family lives this belief by making sure that Luke and Max both know they will always have two mommies and daddies. Joel also has an amazing mentoring like relationship with the boys’ birth father.

One of the best things about fostering and adopting, in Kaia’s view, is having two beautiful children to adopt. Both she and Joel want to raise their children to be compassionate to others; they believe that being a foster family has really helped teach compassion to her children, and helps them to not be judgmental.

Kaia and Joel are wonderful advocates for foster care and adoption. They know and Kaia spoke about how great the need is for foster parents in the state and what an amazing experience it could be. “Changing the life of one child is the most rewarding experience,” she said. “And, although fostering can be stressful, the reward is so much better. It’s all worth it in the end to watch them grow.



“While [fostering] may not be right for everyone, if this is something you are interested in, it’s definitely worth looking into. Please think about making that call! I am so thankful that we did. My family would be missing out on knowing and loving two of the most incredible little guys in the world. We are so blessed to have them in our family!”

The Beyer family is just one example of a Jockey “Home to Stay™” family. Before their Home to Stay visit, personalized backpacks were created for their children containing books, games, blankets, and other goodies to help the family further celebrate adoption finalizations. If you have recently completed a special needs adoption and would like to take part in the Home to Stay program, please contact us at 414-475-1246 or 800-762-8063.

When families start the conversation about possibly adopting, the first question many people think about is age. There are a lot of unknowns in any adoption, but those unknowns can multiply with age and multiple moves, and that can be unnerving for some families.

There is also the idea of, “why does it matter, they are almost a legal adult.” Even though these youth will be 18 shortly, take a moment to think back to when you became a legal adult. You probably still relied on your parents for a lot emotionally and financially; not to mention supportive advice, co-signing for apartments or loans, and other general support.

Preparing to Adopt an Older Child

When people say the word adoption, many have visions of babies or young children from orphanages; however, the truth is that children of all ages can be and are adopted every year. In fact, there are hundreds of teenagers who are waiting for a forever family.

There has been a growing trend throughout the United States in which the majority of adoptions today take place from our public child welfare system. Like all children, these older youth need opportunities to develop and grow and experience a sense of belonging. That said, adopting an older child can be both an exciting and stressful experience for families.

One parent shared, “As parents of 12 kiddos, we look at the strengths of each one, and try to always focus on the positive. [The children being involved in several activities] helps to keep up their self-esteem and learn to be responsible for themselves and work as a partner. I can honestly say it works for us . . . the payback is great. We always schedule monthly girls’ and guys’ nights out. Sometimes big, sometimes small things; just some good sharing. Keeping that communication open is the key, as well as thinking before we change the game plan, always listening – and more listening – to each other and showing respect for other opinions.”

Adopting an older child or youth does involve more details and aspects of readiness. Not only the simple fact of adding another child to your home, but also thinking about the educational, emotional, and social aspects of raising an older child. This can sometimes cause concern for a family who is considering adopting an older child who has had adverse life experiences, but there are resources and steps to take to lessen that stress – beginning with being prepared.



Here are some steps that you may find helpful in preparing for an older child to join your family and community:

Educational

- Reach out to your local school district and ask about the programs and services they have to offer.
- Connect with the school social worker or counselor in order to understand the school’s special education services, which may or may not be needed for your child.
- Investigate possible clubs, sports, or other extracurricular activities your child may want to join.

Social

- Research your community supports, such as local YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, or other possible mentor programs.
- Explore other local opportunities for social activities, such as park and recreation programs, community clubs, or spiritual affiliations that may be of interest.

Emotional

- Investigate possible mental health services in your community and connect with your adoption worker about competent counselors in your area who can meet your child’s needs.
- Explore support group resources for adopted youth to help your child connect with other youth who have been adopted to gain peer support and to share experiences.
- Connect with your local Post Adoption Resource Center (PARC), who can provide information, training, and support throughout your adoption journey.

Finding these support resources for your child is an important step; however, it’s just as important to find your own supports as adoptive parents. Your network is critical – especially on those days when things may not be going so well. Surrounding yourself with others who understand your parenting journey can bolster you with solidarity and advice when it is needed.

There are support groups throughout Wisconsin for adoptive parents. Your local PARC can help you find a support group of adoptive parents in your area. If there is not a physical support group near you, there are many online listservs, social media options, and blogs that support adoptive families. You can also read the section of tip sheets entitled “Taking Care of Yourself” on our website: <http://wiadopt.org/Resources/Tipsheets.aspx>.

Lastly, as you prepare for this journey of adopting an older child, try to continually educate yourself on the needs of your child through books, instructive videos, websites, and trainings. You are always welcome to utilize our free lending

library (<http://energyauditor.net/arwlib/arw-splash.html>) and take advantage of the opportunities listed on our calendar of events (<http://wiadopt.com/>).

Here is what one parent shared about her experience parenting a teenager:

“There are many ‘practical’ pieces to parenting teens: curfews, responsibilities (home and school), meals together, giving of self (volunteering), extra-curricular activities, self-advocacy, life skills, driving rules, dating rules, ‘the talk’, the care of body, mind and spirit, etc. Although challenging and chaotic at times, and a logistics challenge, for me, this was the ‘easier part’ of parenting a teen. The struggle for me, was/is, in the lessons they continue to teach me.

“My teens have taught me some tough lessons, the emotional lessons that must be lived in order to be learned. They taught me that I need to trust and believe that I have done the best I can – perfect? No, a far cry from, but I did my best, and my best six years ago looks different from my best today, and will likely be different when my youngest hits those terrific teen years. Yet, I need to trust that it is my best. Despite my best efforts, my teens will still make mistakes and make some bad choices – I can’t blame myself. I can, however, try to help them learn from their falls and be their rock. After all, isn’t this how they learned to walk? Some of life’s best lessons are the most challenging, and painful – especially for a parent. I had to learn to let my teenagers ‘fall’.

“My teens are also teaching me to remember the BIG picture. I have tried to parent and teach them to always do their best, do well in school, make good choices, etc. However, in the BIG picture, what I strive for even more than the aforementioned is that I want them to like who they are. I want them to have honest, trusting relationships. I want them to know they have gifts to offer, that they are valued, and that I care. I want them to know they are loved, I want them to know there is always a place to call home. When I focus on the BIG picture, some of the daily challenges of raising a teen become less challenging, and come into better focus.”



Kids Need Permanence – At Any Age

A boy sits staring out the window of his Case Manager’s car. He smiles at the sound of music on the radio and is intrigued when they pass a basketball court and he sees kids playing. He is wearing his favorite blue shirt and he is trying to not get too excited about going to his new foster home. Though he gets angry from time to time, the boy does all right in school and gets along with his classmates.

Based on this description, a lot of families would jump at the chance to be this boy’s adoptive resource. Not as many would, however, when they find out the boy is 16 years old.

Top 10 Reasons for Adopting Teens

1. No diapers to change.
2. We sleep through the night.
3. We will be ready to move out sooner . . . but we can still visit.
4. You don’t just get a child, you get a friend.
5. We will keep you up-to-date with the latest fashion trends.
6. No more carpools; we can drive you places.
7. No bottles, formula, or burp rags required.
8. We can help out around the house.
9. We can learn from you.
10. We can teach you how to run your computer.



Resources

Resources from the Coalition Library

Our Own: Adopting & Parenting the Older Child, by Trish Maskew

Parenting Your Adopted Older Child, by Brenda McCreight

Adopting the Older Child, by Claudia L. Jewett

Older Child Adoption, by Grace Robinson

No More Here and There – Adopting the Older Child, by Ann Carney

Joining New Families: A Study of Adoption and Fostering in Middle Childhood, by David Quinton

Closing the Gap, by Jay MacGraw

Brothers and Sisters in Adoption, by Arleta M. James

Parenting to Build Character in Your Teen, by Michael S. Josephson, Val J. Peter, Tom Dowd

The Family of Adoption, by Joyce Maguire Pavao

Coalition Tip Sheets

The Balance Beam of Life: Caring for Yourself, While Caring for Your Kids

<http://wiadopt.org/Portals/WIAadopt/Tipsheets/TakingCare/SelfCare.pdf>

Self Care for Families

<http://wiadopt.org/Portals/WIAadopt/Tipsheets/TakingCare/fpSelfCare.pdf>

Supporting Youth Who Transition Out of the Foster Care System at Age 18

<http://wiadopt.org/Portals/WIAadopt/Tipsheets/ChildrenYouth/SupportingYouthTransitions.pdf>

Adoption Has No Age Limits: Adult Adoptions

<http://wiadopt.org/Portals/WIAadopt/Tipsheets/Getting%20Started/AdultAdoption.pdf>

Ways to Help Youth and Children in Care

<http://wiadopt.org/Portals/WIAadopt/Tipsheets/Getting%20Started/helpachild.pdf>

Additional Resources

Adopting Older Children – Child Welfare Information Gateway

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/permanency/adoption/children/older.cfm>

You Gotta Believe

<http://yougottabelieve.org/>

Upcoming Events

Family Fun Day at Swan's Pumpkin Farm

We had so much fun with families last year at Swan's Pumpkin Farm, we decided to do it again this September!

Join us on Sunday, September 29 from Noon to 3 p.m. Swan's Pumpkin Farm is located at 5930 Hwy H in Franksville. Admission is only \$5 per person and includes lunch (hot dogs, brats, and hamburgers provided), hay rides, barrel train rides, corn maze, petting zoo, and spook house (appropriate for young children). In addition, each child will receive a pumpkin to take home. This is a great family-friendly afternoon and a chance to meet other adoptive families, as well.

You can register online at <http://pumpkinfarm2013.eventbrite.com>.

Please note that a photographer will be present to take pictures throughout the day. If you prefer not to have your family photographed, please feel free to speak with the photographer or one of the Coalition staff members on site.



Family is more than a legal tie to another person; it is holiday dinners, birthday cards, and meaningful hugs. If these youth decide to go to college or into the work force, they will need someone for late-night calls, help with frustrating situations, and dating advice. When you adopt an older child, you may not see their first steps, but you will watch them walk through life and into a bright adulthood.

*The truth is, everybody
needs somebody,
especially older youth
in foster care.*





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Family of websites:
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wiadopt.org
wifostercareandadoption.org
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An umbrella of services over
adoption and foster care:
information and referral;
recruitment; training,
education and support for
families and professionals.



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