



Adoption Works
2017
Adoption Awareness
month



Learn More www.adoption.on.ca

THE CHANGING FACE OF ADOPTION

We should ALL care that over 5000 young people in this province under the age of 18 living in permanent foster care (through no fault of their own) and that at least 1000 turn 18 each year and are dismissed from the child welfare system without having found permanence.

Over 50 years ago the long gone Toronto Telegram newspaper began running a feature highlighting a foster child in need of an adoptive home. In 1964, "Today's Child" launched with a photo of "Hope," a 15-month-old bi racial girl with developmental delays who was in Toronto's foster care system. There was great worry that no one would respond—at the time healthy white newborn babies were considered the "gold standard" for a family wanting to adopt and supply was plentiful. To everyone's great surprise, Toronto Children's Aid Society received more than 40 requests from families looking to adopt the little girl.

50 years ago 15 months was feared too late for a family--but it wasn't for Hope. Fast forward 50 plus years and we now know that all kids are deserving of a forever family. Sibling groups of 2, 3 and 4, medically fragile children and youth, kids with all kinds of special needs and of all ages are able to leave foster care forever and grow up and grow old in a permanent family through adoption (my daughter was 16 when we met her). As the profile of kids who are finding a family changes so does the make up of adoptive families—specifically single parents and same sex couples are now recognized as wonderful candidates to parent. This is good news for us all—the kids, the families, our communities and ultimately our province and country.

November is Adoption Awareness Month where we shed a light on the most vulnerable young people in our province and vow to do better for them. The best solution for these children is a permanent family. We all have a part to play in ensuring this will happen for all children and youth leaving foster care. We can become adoptive parents, be part of pushing our government to do more to find families for these kids—our kids--AND support the families that do choose to become their forever home.



"We should ALL care that over 5000 young people in this province under the age of 18 living in permanent foster care (through no fault of their own)"

For 30 years, the Adoption Council of Ontario (ACO) has been working alongside child welfare agencies and the government in finding families for kids and supporting successful placements through education, clinical supports, and building community based networks for parents and youth across the province. ALL of these pieces must be in place to ensure we keep our promise to our children and youth-- they deserve a better future.

The ACO is the first step in finding out more about what YOU can do to ensure that every child in this province has a family to grow up and grow old in. Check out www.adoption.on.ca to find out more.

*Aviva Zukerman Schure,
works for the Adoption Council of Ontario*

ADOPTION WORKS

Ask people touched by adoption to tell you what adoption means to them and you will get many deeply affecting and uniquely personal answers. Which is as it should be for something that is so utterly and profoundly life-changing. From time to time, we should also step back and look at adoption in a broader social context, particularly this month, which is Adoption Awareness Month. Why?

Because adoption works.

Adoption works for children and youth who want and need families for a life-time.

Adoption works for families who are able to provide a home where kids can grow up and grow old in.

Adoption works for communities that care for the well-being of one another.

And have no doubt, Adoption works for our province and our country.

How?

Take a look at some of our most difficult, heart-breaking social issues today: homelessness, poverty, suicide rates, drug and alcohol addictions, the opioid crisis, mental health issues to name a few. I think everyone would agree that finding solutions to these social issues are critical and pressing.

Adoption doesn't solve all of these issues but it can positively impact the trajectory of one of the most vulnerable, at-risk populations of children and youth in our province for these issues: kids in foster care who cannot safely return home.

There are 5,000 kids in Ontario currently in permanent foster care. ALL of these kids need the permanence of a family and fewer than 800 will join an adoptive family in any year. More than a 1,000 will leave foster care each year at the age of 18 without a stable family connection. We know that kids that leave the system without a permanent family, suffer more and for longer.

This is not ok. Every kid needs a family. And adoption, when everyone involved is well prepared and well supported on their life-long journey, works and can be part of the solution. Kids who have experienced trauma and loss (through no fault of their own) have a chance to heal in families.

Finding and supporting a family for every youth leaving foster care WILL make a difference.

- Finding a family for every kid may not eliminate youth homelessness but it may very well reduce the frequency and length of stays at shelters.



- Finding a family for every kid will not eliminate suicide or suicidal ideation but the involvement of a family may give a kid more hope, support and resiliency in times of difficulty.

- Finding a family for every kid may not eliminate opioid addiction but it may help lessen the grip it has on many kids when they believe that someone cares, really cares no matter what and forever.

- Finding a family for every kid will not eliminate mental health issues but it gives kids a built-in advocate for their whole lives should they need one.

- Finding a family for every kid may not eliminate involvement in the justice system but it will provide support to a youth or young adult who may be better served by a diversion and specialized help, instead of jail time.

- And finding a family for every kid won't cure developmental trauma but a family will help them heal.

We all benefit when kids who have experienced trauma and loss heal.

That's what adoption is all about. It's not a fairy tale; it's real. There are many words that could be used to describe it, but the bottom line is that it works if we have a society that embraces and supports it.

*Kathy Soden,
works for the Adoption Council of Ontario*

ALL THIS FAMILY IS WHAT I NEED

Every year, I bring my family through adoption to ACO's FunWalk fundraiser. I spend a lot of time with my family though adoption. Earlier this week, I came down with strep throat and my adoptive mother offered to come pick me up and take me to the doctor.

This year, I wanted to invite my biological mom. I was morally adopted at 16, having spent most of my life with my biological mom, we kept our relationship through my time in foster care and after I was adopted. My adoptive and biological family don't mix (for now), so she could only come because my adoptive family couldn't that year.

It's big, it's messy, it's not perfect – but all this family is what I need in my life. To make the analogy simple, my biological mom was able to offer emotional support but she couldn't actually have taken me to the doctor when I had strep because she doesn't have the resources to do so.

This year for FunWalk ACO created "Why I Care" posters. Sometimes it's hard to narrow down for me. Why do I care about adoption supports? Shall I crack out the world map that is my experience with adoption? Some of the roads aren't paved, some of them seem to pointlessly overlap and there doesn't seem to be a direct route to anywhere but at least it's something. How do I distill all that into a simple message? It made me come back to the beginning – because my CAS thought I didn't need that world map. And I *did* do!

When I came into care, I had a sibling 12 years my junior. When they made an adoption plan for her at the very 'adoptable' age of two...I was left out of it. Recently I asked my family about this, had the social workers talked to them about a sibling who would be left in care? About the importance of this relationship?

They told me yes, but I also distinctly remember being 'prepared' to never see my sister again. I can't imagine that staying in touch with me would have been a condition of my sister's adoption.

By the time I found out I wasn't going back home to my biological mom, I was just about 16. The perfect age for no family to want. The most likely outcome? Move out on my own at 18, figure it out...maybe. All I know is that if the family that had adopted my sister wasn't interested in the teenage sibling, I would have aged out of care 'without a family'.



"Loving me is a team effort, and each piece of my family seems to meet different needs when it comes to that. Holidays get crazy, but I would rather them be crazy than empty."

I put that in brackets because, I still would have been connected to my biological mom...but she wouldn't have been able to support me. Because my sister would have still been my family, even if I wasn't able to see her. These two shotgun sized holes in my chest certainly wouldn't have set me up for success.

I was never legally adopted, that's not what I needed. I needed to keep my sister in my life. I needed a family that could support me, provide me with permanence until I was ready to become independent not because I had to be. A family that didn't expire at 18 or 21. I needed to keep a relationship with the mother I came from and grew up with.

My situation is unique. It doesn't happen this way often. Let's change that. Let's change the way we look at adoption. So that we can find a situation that works for every youth in the foster care system at risk of aging out without all the pieces in place to support them in success.

Wendy Hayes is a communication professional and has lived experience with foster care and adoption

ADOPTION WORKS FOR FAMILIES

Families are formed in many different ways and adoption is one of the ways that can happen.

Often, people assume that people look to adoption to form their families if there are infertility issues. This may be the case—but isn't always. People are drawn to adoption for many reasons—but all the reasons are the same---to include children into their lives.

Adoption is a process that creates a permanent relationship between human beings who then form a family---and that family has all the characteristics of any other family---love, empathy, fun, joy, mistakes, struggles and hope!

A family created by adoption also has a few other characteristics. These include an immediate extended family, another set of parents, a history of loss and a legacy/history that the child/children bring with them to the family---even if they come to the family at birth. These characteristics add a complexity to families formed by adoption that need to be supported and nourished. This complexity provides the perfect base to create families that grow, learn, challenge and enhance the lives of all the family members and society at large.

Why create a family by adoption? The simple answer..why not? There are children looking for a permanent family and families looking for permanent children and combined---they create a new family unit that can offer what we all hope for from our families---a secure base, a place to call home, a place that we can be accepted for who we are and challenged to become who we are meant to be. Adoption is a journey of addition not subtraction!



“So—why create a family by adoption—because every child and youth deserves to have a family to call their own.”

Adoption also often means that birth siblings can stay together and continue their relationship with each other in their permanent family. If that is not possible, they can often stay in each other's lives with contact, visits and connections!!

Adoption is, by it's very nature, is the solution to create families!!

*Karen Moore,
an adoptive mom and Clinical Director, Open Doors for
Lanark Children & Youth*

ADOPTION WORKS FOR COMMUNITY

Nelson Mandela once said, “There can be no keener revelation in a society’s soul than the way it treats its children.”

Over the month of November, we have been highlighting elements of The Changing Face of Adoption and particularly the benefits of adoption for us all.

Adoption Works

Adoption works for children and youth who want and need families for a life-time and for families who bring these children and youth into their lives.

We know that about 1,000 youth in Ontario will leave foster care every year to experience ‘independent living’ and navigate the world without the ongoing support of a family who will guide them and pick them up when they fall.

We have a lot of experience to know that the outcomes for youth who leave foster care without a family are grim including high rates of homelessness, incarceration and much lower rates of graduation from high school. A most disturbing stat is that 60% of girls will have a child within 5 years and that child is two times more likely to enter the foster care system – and the cycle continues.

Now let’s focus, for a minute, and think about the social and economic advantages for our community if every young person leaves foster care be connected with a committed, caring and safe adult – a family connection.

- Youth will have the support to continue to pursue their education at the pace that works for them.
- Youth will have someone to support them through the challenges of adolescence and early adulthood even when they make mistakes along the way.
- Youth will have a family they can come home to, being cared for and have unconditional acceptance and support on the lifelong journey of healing from early life trauma that was not their fault.

Jean Vanier, advocate for persons with disabilities said it well – “One of the marvelous things about community is that it enables us to welcome and help people in a way we couldn’t as individuals. When we pool our strength and share the work and responsibility, we can welcome many people, even those in deep distress, and perhaps help them find self-confidence and inner healing”.



“And have no doubt, Adoption works for our community, our province, and our country.”

Quite simply, families – who are trained and supported – will remain committed to our young people long after the ‘system’ will or can – to complete high school, to heal from the trauma of their early years and find a path to employment and build lasting relationships around them.

We can all be part of the solution. Consider:

- Looking into adoption as a way to build your family
- Become a mentor to a youth
- Hire a youth who has lived experience with foster care and may need extra support in the workplace to build confidence and capacity
- And, most importantly, let youth who are in your life know that they are valued and important to you.

The collective impact of community caring will benefit us all.

Every child, every person needs to know that they are a source of joy ... needs to be celebrated.”

--Jean Vanier

*Pat Convery,
Executive Director of ACO*

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