



# Adjusting Expectations

## Before, During, and After Adoption

When becoming a parent, it's common to have certain expectations. For example, you might expect your child to attend your alma mater or that they'll enjoy football because you do. Anyone who is a parent – biological, adoptive, or kinship – can tell you that expectations aren't always reality. At times children will wildly surpass our expectations; other times they may struggle. As parents it is our job to meet our kids where they are at and make adjustments to help them be their best selves.

The MARE Adoption Navigator team is staffed by adoptive parents who know the value of making big moves to help their children and their families succeed. "When the family thrives, we all benefit," says one adoption navigator.

For some families, location makes all the difference. One navigator moved to a new city to help her children, while another found that staying put was the best thing.

- "When my husband and I adopted cross-culturally, we chose to relocate to provide our children with the opportunity to grow up in a culturally diverse environment. We believe that living in a city, school, and community rich in diversity offers our children the best chance to thrive. Our goal is to ensure our children feel a strong sense of belonging as well as to help them understand and appreciate different cultures and backgrounds. (My children) are more confident and comfortable being themselves."
- "We had a plan to move out of the state of Michigan and closer to family when we had kids. We did our research... looking at school districts, neighborhoods, community resources, and budget and had to admit that the community where we were currently living had a lot more to offer and was a better fit. We decided to stay put and parent far from our families in order to ensure our kids could have the experiences and resources they would need to thrive."

### Fall 2024

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Learn more about foster care adoption at [www.mare.org](http://www.mare.org).

Another navigator learned, through some challenging experiences, that it really does take a community and a village to raise a child:

- Our family has had to get comfortable with law enforcement being in our home. We learned when to ask them for help. This includes becoming familiar with the juvenile justice system and courts all in an effort to help our child become the best version of themselves. For my family, learning to ask for help when we don't have the answers and to lean on others has helped us build our village."

Two MARE navigators found that adjustments to their schedules were necessary to contribute to their family's well-being and to enhance family bonding.

- "We chose to transition our children from a public-school environment, to providing them a homeschool education. Homeschooling gave us the opportunity to recognize their individual learning styles and customize their curriculum according to their passions, personality and heritage. Educating at home gave us the ability to meet them where they were educationally, emotionally, and socially so that we could support them. Homeschooling allowed us more one-on-one time with our kids which strengthened our bond."
- "I chose to give up a full-time career. Due to ongoing medical needs and appointments, it was necessary for one parent to have a more open and flexible schedule. A part-time job gives me the freedom to help provide financially for our family. I have also been able to be more physically present. Working part time gives me

the ability to offer the kids freedom to hang out while still offering needed supervision."

Educational well being led to two of our own MARE navigators adjusting expectations and making changes to help their kids be their best:

- "For our family, school was always a main source of contention and stress. So many IEP, 504, advocacy, and disciplinary meetings. We concluded that our children would be better served in a new school district. We chose a new school and community; both of which were better equipped to meet their educational, social, and emotional needs. I'm so thankful we took that huge leap of faith. It gave us a fresh start and has made all the difference."
- "We expected that our son would graduate with a diploma when in fact, and in his best interest, he graduated with a certificate of completion. Our student's schooling was not completed when he graduated, but continued through age twenty-six. The world is filled with many different individuals with different abilities and needs. As I learned how to best advocate, modify expectations, and love my child I grew in my compassion and care of others. My child has also grown in their compassion and understanding of others."

As the navigator's stories show, we are not all made from the same mold, but we all have tremendous value and deserve care, love, and acceptance. Sometimes making a big move – in location, expectation, or otherwise – is the best way to help your children and family thrive.



*Did you know?*

November is National Adoption Month and to celebrate, MARE recognizes 30 outstanding families and grants 30 wishes all in 30 days? Be sure to check out our social media pages for more information!



Kaylee, C010245

## Meet Kaylee: Artist and Storyteller

The holiday season approaches when the MARE team first gets to know Kaylee, and we learn that apples are fine, but for pies, pumpkin is divine. We also learn that she's not a fan of spicy food, and she's definitely not much of a morning person.

The biggest takeaway from our cool conversations with this congenial young lady has to be Kaylee's passion for art, especially drawing, which she learned on her own.

"I used to watch 'how-to-draw' videos," she says. "I would basically copy what they're doing and that's how I got better at drawing. I watched a bunch of people draw and then I just did it.

As eager as she is to share her knowledge and artistic expertise with her peers so they can preserve their own memories, Kaylee is just as anxious to make new ones with a forever family. Some of the things Kaylee hopes to do with her new family include going to the movies, going for ice cream and going to the zoo.

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## Jaheim's Dreams: Family and Success

If Jaheim could visit anywhere in the world, it'd be a place out of this world: Heaven. Why? "I want to seek guidance from God," Jaheim says.

This fascinating young man would love to participate in sports such as football and basketball, as well as a reading club. He loves playing video games, and watching movies, especially after school. Jaheim likes to keep things simple when it comes to his wishes. He'd wish for wealth, happiness and most of all, a family. "Jaheim has a big heart and has a strong desire to be part of a family," says an adult close to him.

When he's asked what he's most proud of, Jaheim says his progress, which should help him in his career aspirations. Jaheim says he wants to become a lawyer, surgeon, detective, engineer, or IT guy one day.



Jaheim, C09549, Photo: Paul Rains

# Kid's Corner



## Pumpkin Gratitude Activity

**What you'll need:** A big pumpkin and a sharpie (permanent) marker.

~Put your pumpkin outside on your doorstep (it'll last longer out there in the cool weather).

~Each day, write one thing that you are thankful for on your pumpkin.

~At the end of the month (or however long you choose to do this for), you will have a whole pumpkin's worth of blessings recorded.

## Heart Gallery Recap

On Saturday, September 21st, roughly 160 people were in attendance for the 2024 Michigan Heart Gallery Premiere. Those in attendance ranged from MARE youth and staff to foster workers to Judson Center and MDHHS employees.

We were delighted to hear from enthusiastic speakers such as Demetrius Starling, Senior Deputy Director for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services' Children's Services Administration and George Winn, Chief Strategy Officer of Judson Center.



MARE staff presented the Heart Gallery Photographer of the Year Award to Lynell Miller for her dedication and passion of volunteering her time and talents to the MARE youth awaiting adoption.

Additionally, two families who adopted teens were presented with the Mac Ballantine Award. This award is in honor of former MARE Navigator, Mac Ballantine, who was passionate about finding forever families for teens in foster care. Thank you to everyone who made it to the event and we hope to see you next year!

## Calendar

### November 23 National Adoption Day

National Adoption Day is a collective, grassroots effort to raise awareness of children waiting to be adopted from foster care in the United States. November is National Adoption Month to coincide with National Adoption Day.

### January 18 Meet & Greet

Virtual Event

Registration will be available on [www.mare.org](http://www.mare.org)

### February 22 Meet & Greet

Ann Arbor

Registration will be available on [www.mare.org](http://www.mare.org)

**Take note:** Watch for notices of upcoming Meet & Greets on [www.mare.org](http://www.mare.org) and on Facebook and Instagram.

*Check out VideosbyMARE on Youtube! The Heart Gallery film is available for viewing!*

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