

The Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange is a program of Judson Center and is funded by the Michigan Department of Human Services.

To learn about foster care adoption and view photolistings and videos of waiting children, visit our website at www.mare.org



THE MARE INQUIRY PROCESS

What Happens After You Inquire

BY MAGGIE WHITE, ADOPTION NAVIGATOR

I'm an organized kind of girl. When I was trying to adopt from foster care, I kept a spreadsheet of all of my inquiries and had columns for the children's names, their identification number, the date I inquired and the follow up I received. More often than not, the cells for follow up information remained empty. The longer my wait to adopt became, the more frustrated I was by that lack of response. I kept thinking to myself "I know I'm not a perfect parent, but I must be better than NO parent at all, right?" Every time I didn't get a response to an inquiry I took it like a personal rejection.

Now that I am an adoptive parent and a MARE Adoption Navigator I know that so much goes on behind the scenes after a family submits their inquiry. What seemed like rejections to me were actually extremely busy social workers taking the time necessary to make the best decisions for the children.

Laura Rutkowski, MARE Worker Liaison, works closely with child and family workers and encourages them to follow up on all inquiries. She feels that it's important for families to understand the work behind the inquiry. "In its simplest form, a MARE inquiry connects an interested family's adoption worker with a waiting child's adoption worker," explains Rutkowski. "Workers then communicate to share specific qualities or skills needed by the family or specific diagnoses or behaviors present in the child. These details are not viewable on the MARE website, as they include confidential, in-depth details about both children and families. Often, a match is ruled out during this initial information sharing."

INQUIRY TIP: HAVE OPEN, REGULAR DIALOGUE WITH YOUR ADOPTION WORKER TO ENSURE THEY ARE ADVOCATING FOR YOUR FAMILY THROUGHOUT THE INQUIRY PROCESS.

It can be frustrating to be ruled out before you ever get a chance to learn more about a child you inquired about. I experienced that frustration while I was waiting to adopt, and the Adoption Navigator team often takes calls from families feeling that same frustration. But families are not without power at this stage. Make sure to keep an open communication with your adoption worker

and your adoption navigator – these are the people who have your back and can advocate for your family.

If, when the workers first communicate, they determine a family might be a match for a child, formal assessments will then be sent out. "For families this is the homestudy (BCAL 3130 and addendums), and for our waiting children this is the Adoption Referral Packet or disclosure packet," explains Rutkowski. A child's worker may also opt to send an abbreviated version called a Child Adoptive Assessment (CAA). Often, families inquire about children that don't match up with what the family is approved for. If a worker for a 16 year old child receives a homestudy that only approves the family for 5-10 year olds, the family is not likely to be considered as a good match.

INQUIRY TIP: MAKE SURE THAT THE BEHAVIORS, DIAGNOSES AND DEMOGRAPHICS DOCUMENTED IN YOUR HOMESTUDY MATCH WITH THE CHILDREN YOU ARE INQUIRING ABOUT. IF YOU WANT TO CHANGE WHAT YOU'RE APPROVED FOR, TALK TO YOUR ADOPTION WORKER ABOUT YOUR OPTIONS.

Policy plays a big role in the inquiry process as well. This can be the part of the process that is hardest for families to swallow. I have had families tell me that they think it's too slow. It's important to understand that workers don't typically just have one family to review – they often have many families and many homestudies to consider. And they are tasked with not just finding any family... but the right family for the child. Because kids in foster care have had enough loss in their life – now, they need permanency.

"The child's adoption worker is to collect as many homestudies as they can for 21 days," summarizes Rutkowski. "Then, after assessing the prospective families, the child's adoption worker will select the most appropriate family based on the information documented in their homestudy. Once this family is identified, the child's adoption worker will give the family's worker the child's Adoption Referral Packet. This family now has their own 21 days to determine if they want to move forward with this child, based on the detailed information. If the family decides they are not able to commit to adoption, the child's adoption worker will request the Adoption Referral Packet

be returned, and then will send it to the next most appropriate family. The 21 day time frame begins again with this next family and continues until all appropriate families have been considered. These 3 week intervals can make the process take months from a family's initial inquiry."

INQUIRY TIP: BE PATIENT! IF YOU HAVEN'T HEARD THAT THE CHILD IS MATCHED WITH ANOTHER FAMILY OR THAT YOUR FAMILY IS INAPPROPRIATE FOR THE CHILD, ODDS ARE YOUR HOMESTUDY IS STILL BEING HELD AS A POSSIBLE MATCH.

While policies and best practices are in place for Michigan's social workers, the fact of the matter is that these are children we are talking about. Sometimes kids may be in need of some additional time or therapy before they can move forward with a permanent placement. That's a hard concept for waiting families to grasp because we all know that a loving home is the best place for every child. But for a child who has been maltreated and moved from home to home, the idea of family doesn't necessarily equal love and respect; instead, "family" can mean distrust and fear. Therapy can help a child start to heal from past hurts and help prepare the child for a permanent home.

INQUIRY TIP: GIVE IT TIME. WHILE IT'S EASY TO FALL IN LOVE WITH A CHILD'S PHOTOLISTED PROFILE, KEEP IN MIND THAT THERE IS SO MUCH MORE TO EACH CHILD'S BACKGROUND. JUST AS YOU'LL NEED TO HELP A CHILD HEAL ONCE THEY ARE IN YOUR HOME, YOU MAY NEED TO GIVE BEING MATCHED WITH A CHILD SOME TIME, BECAUSE TIME MAY BE JUST WHAT THAT CHILD NEEDS TO BE READY FOR YOU.

"Children in care have experienced a great deal of trauma and stress and are learning to cope, in addition to the regular challenges of child development," explains Rutkowski. "Often their behaviors, diagnoses and documented experiences are too severe for many families. Each child's adoption worker has the difficult task of assessing families, but more importantly they have the responsibility to the children they work for to make sure they only share the personal details contained in the Adoption Referral Packet with families who will be able to meet their specific, special needs and make a lifelong commitment."



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DISCLOSURE MEETINGS

What to Ask and What to Expect

BY MAGGIE WHITE AND DORENE JONES, ADOPTION NAVIGATORS

Disclosure meetings are scheduled when you have been identified as a good potential match for a child and, after reviewing that child's assessment, your family wants to learn more. It's an exciting time, but it can also be overwhelming. You may not have met the child at this point and you're being given so much information – some of which is emotional and upsetting to read. It's important, however, to remind yourself that behind all of this paperwork is a child who desperately needs a family. It's your responsibility to honestly determine if your family can give that child everything he or she needs.

Review all of the paperwork you have been given on the child before the disclosure meeting. It's a good idea to sit down with your adoption worker and develop a list of questions to ask at the disclosure meeting. Some suggestions:

- How many placements has the child had? Why were the moves necessary?
- Ask for details about previous significant behaviors.
- How is the child functioning in his or her current placement?
- How has the child's behavior been in similar environments to your home?
- What rewards/consequences does the child respond best to?
- What services are currently in place to meet the child's needs?
- What relationships does the child currently have that will be important to maintain?
- What is the plan to transition the child into your home if you move forward with adoption?
- Be sure to clarify any acronyms in the child's documentation you don't understand. E.g. RAD = Reactive Attachment Disorder, BM = Birth Mother, etc.
- What type of trainings or family therapy is recommended to help you best parent this child?
- What services are going to be available to you after adoption?

Remember that it's also your right to request that other professionals involved in the child's life attend the disclosure meeting. Beyond the child's adoption worker; foster parents, therapists, Wendy's Wonderful Kids recruiters, ARC workers, residential workers and others may be appropriate resources to attend the disclosure meeting. It's in your best interests – and the child's! – to talk to the people who know the child best.



Offer Your Support to Foster Youth

We're always looking for strong, loving and supportive homes for foster youth, but that's not the only way you can help kids in care. If you're looking for another way to reach out to kids, the Camellia Network is for you. This program connects youth aging out of the foster care system with a community of resources, opportunities, encouragement and support. Former and current foster youth, ages 18-23 are invited to join the Network and create a personal profile, giving them a place to express themselves, share their goals for the future and articulate what they need to be successful. Then, individuals – like you! – can help provide the support these young people lack. Support isn't limited to material donations – these kids are also in need of help such as words of encouragement, career advice, and professional connections. When the efforts of caring individuals and corporations combine, we can help these youth navigate their way to a successful adulthood.

Camellia Network is currently seeking new partnerships to serve youth aging out of foster care in Michigan. We need people to join to support youth, businesses to offer opportunities, and organizations to offer their resources to youth in Camellia Network.

If you would like to get involved, please contact: Jennifer Brooks, MARE Youth Specialist. 734.528.2061 or email her at Jennifer_brooks@judsoncenter.org



CAMELLIA NETWORK

Ni'Shawn C07906



© Melanie Reyes

Ni'Shawn is a young boy who has good manners and is polite. He enjoys visiting his current caregiver's cottage, fishing and being outdoors. Currently, he is really excited about his math class. After school, Ni'Shawn likes to spend time playing the Xbox 360. His current caregiver reports, "Ni'Shawn is a people-pleaser and is very helpful!" Ni'Shawn likes to read and is interested in Science Fiction.

Ni'Shawn would benefit from a strong single or two-parent family with a good support system. He would do best if he is the youngest (if there are older teens) or only child in the home as he requires a great deal of attention and supervision. The adoptive family should have experience or knowledge of parenting children who have overcome difficult pasts and have special needs. The family will need to be very patient and sup-

portive of Ni'Shawn as he learns to manage his emotions and build new and trusting relationships. The family must utilize a strong support system and seek out any positive services that would be beneficial to the Ni'Shawn's emotional, developmental and educational needs.

It is important that Ni'Shawn is able to maintain close contact with his siblings Shantaina (C07907) and Antonio (C07908). While the siblings are being listed separately, their adoption worker noted that if the right family would be able to adopt all three children together, she would be open to that option.

To inquire about Ni'Shawn visit www.mare.org



Wendy's Match Parties Return in November and December

Wendy's is sponsoring adoption match parties around Southeast Michigan for waiting youth and families! They have partnered with Spaulding for Children to provide multiple opportunities for waiting children and adoptive families to enjoy fun and games and delicious food. Wendy's will be providing food at each event — specific locations and details will be sent after registering. Each event will run from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

- November 2 - Imlay City
- November 3 - Clinton Township
- November 10 - Mount Clemens
- November 16 - Chesterfield
- November 17 - Chesterfield
- November 23 - Lincoln Park
- November 24 - Brownstown
- December 7 - Warren
- December 8 - Sterling Heights
- December 14 - Romeo

All families attending must have an approved adoption homestudy. Please note: It is policy that only prospective adoptive parents attend match parties. We ask that you do not bring your children/teens with you.

For more information contact Ann Riggs at ann_riggs@judsoncenter.org or Jessica Gouin at jgouin@spaulding.org.

MICHIGAN ADOPTION RESOURCE EXCHANGE Adoption Navigators

present

MARE ADOPTION CELEBRATION

On Saturday, November 23rd, the MARE Adoption Navigator team would like to celebrate adoptions with all of our families who have finalized an adoption of a MARE child or are in a pre-adoptive placement with a MARE child.

If you're a MARE family, please contact Michelle Carlton for more information about this day of fun, food, support and information for adoptive families. You can contact Michelle by phone at 734-528-2042 or via email Michelle_Carlton@JudsonCenter.org.



Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange

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Find us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Pinterest

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

November 3, 2013

Traverse City Parent Connections Group

6pm – 8pm

West Side Community Church, Traverse City

Get to know other adoptive families and share your triumphs and trials. Childcare provided by reservation. RSVP to Kjrirsten Boeve at 231.590.8644 or kboeve@bethany.org.

November 4, 2013

Washtenaw County Support Group for Adoptive & Foster Parents

6:30pm – 8:30pm

Genesis of Ann Arbor

Please contact Christine Moellering at 734.644.1530.

November 10, 2013

2013 Adoption Celebration with Adoptive Family Support Network

4pm – 7pm

3 Mile Project, Grand Rapids

Family fun for all ages including inflatables, foosball tables, a puppet troupe & space to relax & meet other adoptive families. Cost: \$5 per person with \$20 immediate family maximum (pizza & pop included). Pre-registration required & pre-payment appreciated. More info at www.eventbrite.com/event/6359398131 or RSVP to registration@afsn.org.

November 10, 2013

"Roots" Adoption Art Exhibit

2:30pm – 4pm

Nokomis Learning Center, Okemos

This event is open to the public and no pre-registration is required. Please contact Whitney Banks at 517.323.4734 Ext. 1635 or bank-sw@stvcc.org with any questions.

November 19, 2013

Raising Healthy Families Support Group

6pm – 8pm

For all adoptive families whether adopted domestically or internationally. Contact Carrie at 616.558.4717 or cburrows@afsn.org.

December 3, 2013

Parenting Children with Mental Health Diagnoses

6pm – 8pm

Orchards Children's Services, Southfield

Learn about mental health diagnoses of children in care and how caregivers can assist them. Please call 248.530.5370 or 248.258.1278 with any questions or to RSVP.

December 9, 2013

Muskegon Parent Group

5pm – 7pm

DHS, Muskegon

For further information or to RSVP, please call Mary Doctor at 231.726.1200 ext. 216, or email at mdoctor@ccwestmi.org.

December 13, 2013

Adopting Older Kids Support Group

6:30pm – 8:30pm

Hands Across the Water, Ann Arbor

Call 734.477.0135 for more information.

December 17, 2013

Petoskey Parent Connections Group

6:30pm – 8:30pm

Independence Village of Petoskey, Petoskey

Please RSVP to Kjrirsten Boeve at either 231.590.8644 or kboeve@bethany.org.

December 19, 2013

Adoptive Parent Support Group

6pm – 8pm

Judson Center, Flint

Food will be provided. Childcare is also available to those RSVP at least 3 days in advance. To RSVP, please contact Pam Ferguson at pamela_ferguson@judsoncenter.org, or 810.732.8510 ext. 25312.

January 2, 2014

Parent Support Group for Foster, Adoptive and Biological Parents

6:30pm – 9:30pm

Lapeer Community Church, Attica

Daycare may be provided for free. Please call first. Contact Kim Hall at 810.724.8800.

January 9, 2014

Adoptive Family Support Meeting and Adopted Youth Club

6pm – 8pm

Judson Center, Ann Arbor

Come have dinner with other families who have adopted. After dinner we'll split into two separate discussion groups. Please RSVP to Tracy Kapusansky at 734.545.3831 or tracy_kapusansky@judsoncenter.org.

View a comprehensive list of events at www.mare.org