

It's All Relative: Supporting Kinship Connections

Loving Parenting: The Most Powerful Intervention for Children

Chantel's dedication as a kinship caregiver to providing her niece Allison with loving, nurturing parenting has transformed Allison's life and created an entirely new trajectory for her. Today, Allison is a trusting, loving, creative, and caring child who is known for her artistic creations; her majestic architectural designs in Minecraft; her sassy (and sweet) commentaries; her love of all things sugary; and her ability to bring light and laughter into whatever room she enters. It is hard to imagine that before Chantel stepped in to provide Allison with the stability, attention, and love that she needed as a toddler, she had already seen the darkest side of people—experiencing serious abuse, neglect, and instability, both at home and in the system.



When Chantel was contacted by a family finder from Seneca to find family connections for children in foster care, Allison had already been bounced through numerous homes. Professionals worried that Allison had both developmental and other delays that would pose immediate challenges to finding a home and to a full and normal childhood. However, Chantel, like so many of the numerous former foster youth who sacrifice and dedicate their lives to ensuring their siblings, nieces, nephews, and cousins don't have the type of experiences they had growing up in care, was determined to ensure that Allison had the connection she knew was necessary for children to heal, grow, and thrive.

Chantel fought for Allison to be placed with her and changed every element of her life to adjust from being a recent college graduate whose priority was a demanding job leading legislative change for youth in foster care with California Youth Connection to a full-time parent whose priorities are child care, visits, doctor's appointments, and diapers.

The Family Finding model is based on the belief that relatives and kin are critical to the well-being of children, and nothing has been truer for Allison. Chantel has worked tirelessly to create a beautiful and full life for her and Allison as a family. Chantel has taught herself to become an effective advocate with medical providers, the education system, and child welfare agencies to ensure Allison is understood, valued, and has the best services and supports possible. In fact, she recently became a first-time home buyer and picked a neighborhood where Allison could have an easy commute to an amazing new arts and music charter school where she is adored by all. Chantel has made sure Allison has had every opportunity she might need to grow: gymnastics, swimming, drama and performing, and play dates. Her weekends and breaks have been full of adventure and new experiences: camping in the wilderness, trips to Santa Cruz and Disneyland, international travel to London, snow sledding, rafting, and more. Perhaps most importantly, Chantel has carefully built a loving and involved extended family for Allison. In addition to maintaining connections with Allison's birth family, Chantel has created a family related by love of aunts, uncles, cousins, and godparents who are all committed to Allison and grateful to have her in their lives. They celebrate her birthdays, holidays, and milestones with her now and always. Chantel and Allison are a perfect example of what can happen when family is engaged early and how loving parenting can be the most powerful intervention for children.

To learn more about the Seneca Family of Agencies, visit <http://familyfinding.org>.



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