

EMPOWERING CAREGIVERS, STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

SMILING MORE

A Foster-to-Adopt Story

I got the call [from Harmony Family Center] while I was trying on clothes at the mall. Would my family be willing to care for a 2-year-old boy who was sitting in the local Department of Children's Services (DCS) office? I went through my list of questions, because I wasn't new at this, and I still came away with only his race, name, and a description and location of a unique birthmark. I knew little about what brought him into custody, his health issues, or family situation. But, following my instincts, I said yes. I then called my husband, rushed home to straighten up the mess left behind by our two adopted children and the foster daughter who had days earlier moved in with her preadoptive family, and watched the caseworker pull in the driveway and walk up the steps holding the hand of a boy who would, a year and half later, become my son.

Jakim's first months with us were tough. He was angry, snarling at me, and hitting or biting our other children. He ran away in the crowded Health Department, hiding under an exam table, too fearful to answer my frantic calls. He ate pages from books or food from the trash and cried for hours, resisting my attempts to hold and comfort him. As he began to receive early intervention services and have regular visitation with his birth family, he began to blossom, smiling more than he was biting.

Jakim attended occupational therapy, strengthening his fine motor skills and addressing his sensory processing disorder. We learned that he needed lots of proprioceptive and vestibular stimulation to regulate his aggressive behaviors. He began working with a speech therapist and as his language began to emerge, his anxiety and frustration decreased. He was finally able to ask for food or milk, instead of digging in the garbage or perusing the bookshelves for an afternoon snack. We worked together with his early interventionist to build his social skills and attachment to our family.

His birth mother, Stacie, visited him regularly, and we texted or spoke on the phone almost daily. After a long child and family team meeting with DCS, Stacie asked my husband and me if we would adopt Jakim if he couldn't return home. We assured her that, though we wanted him to be reunited with her, we would.

The angry, fearful little boy who came to us after I answered a phone call in the mall is now a math whiz and artist. He loves yoga, dancing, and hanging upside down from the monkey bars. He spends time with his birth siblings and recently went to their baptisms. He's proud of his first family and knows that he is loved, often reciting a long list of the people who care about him. Jakim legally joined our family through adoption, but his first mother, siblings, and extended



family are also a part of him, and I am privileged to stand beside them as we watch Jakim become the man he is meant to be.

To learn more about the trauma-informed, evidence-based practices provided by Harmony Family Center, visit <http://harmonyfamilycenter.org/>.



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