

HONORING, UNITING, AND CELEBRATING FAMILIES

A SUCCESSFUL INTERNATIONAL REUNIFICATION

A Social Worker's Story

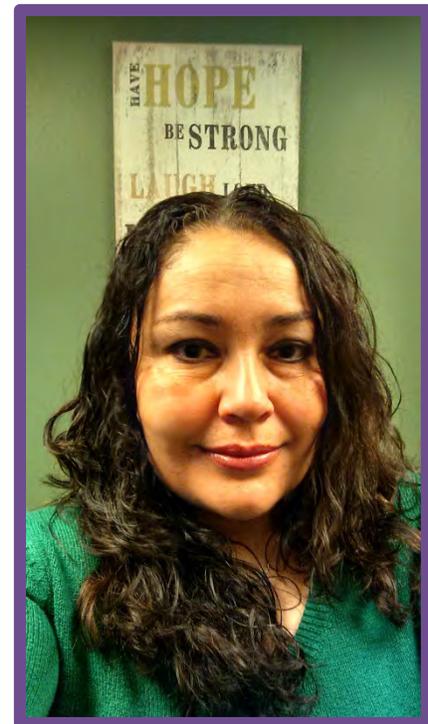
In early 2014, after the State of Washington received multiple allegations that a 6-year-old boy was being neglected by his father, a child protective services investigation found the father had severe mental health issues, including schizophrenia, which interfered with parenting his son, Bryan. The boy had unmet dental, health, physical, and educational needs, and had missed a lot of school due to unstable housing and his father's paranoia that Bryan had been implanted with a "chip." The father and son were always on the move, making it hard to locate them.

In June 2014, the father requested assistance from the Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) because "they were being followed," and the boy was immediately placed in protective custody. Bryan entered foster care while social workers searched for family. Although the father and son reported that the boy's mother was deceased, DCFS discovered that she was alive and residing in Mexico. DCFS contacted her about the dependency petition. The father was given a service plan to improve his parenting but, after a few months, he had made no progress and only had sporadic visits with his son. The court decided to pursue reunification with Bryan's mother, although she hadn't had contact with her son for 5 years.

DCFS contacted Casey Family Programs' Yakima Field Office in April 2015 to assist with this reunification. I immediately contacted the Mexican Consulate and learned that there was already an approved home study by Desalloro Infantil y Familias (DIF) of Mexico (the equivalent child and family agency). We also learned that the mother had been searching for her son in Washington State with the help of DIF and International Affairs.

Using SKYPE, I facilitated video visits between Bryan and his mother, and his mother was able to express how much she loved and missed her son. She engaged him by sharing baby photos, telling stories about his childhood, and welcoming questions. Once the two were comfortable, extended family, including an older brother, grandparents, and aunts, joined the SKYPE visits.

Next, we obtained the child's dual citizenship and authorization to travel to Mexico. We also had to work closely with the guardian ad litem, foster parents, and others to reinforce the notion that



the bond between a parent and child has no physical or emotional borders. Although DCFS and the court differed on how to best reunify them, when Bryan was asked to share his thoughts, the young boy said he yearned for his mother's hugs and kisses.

On August 31, 2015, I accompanied Bryan to Uruapan, Michoacan, Mexico, for a week-long visit. We held a family group conference with extended family and met with a DIF worker and an international affairs attorney. We visited the school he would attend, met with a family counselor, and visited a parcel of land where his mother plans to build a home. The visit was a success, and Bryan did not want to return to Washington, so we provided an affidavit to the court recommending reunification with mother.

The reunification officially took place on October 6, 2015, and we have followed up with frequent texts, phone calls, and SKYPE chats. Mom shares photos and says her son has adjusted well, and he tells us he's happy. We're assisting the mother in completing a parenting plan in order to dismiss the dependency petition.

Bryan is learning to speak Spanish and discovering his culture and ethnic identity. He is making friends and adjusting to a new routine. He has grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins that adore him and support him and his mother.

Learn more about the foster care services provided by Casey Family Programs at <http://www.casey.org/>, the nation's largest operating foundation focused on safely reducing the need for foster care and building communities of hope for children and families across America.



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Children's Bureau

