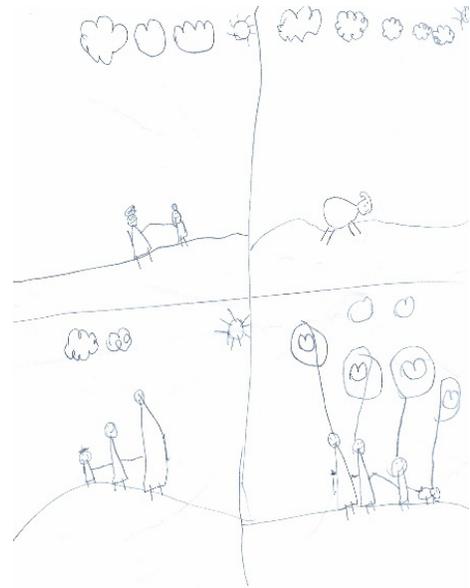


Foster Care as a Support to Families, Not a Substitute for Parents

WELCOMING AN EXTENDED FAMILY

This is the story of a young man, E, who had been placed with his grandmother, Wanda, for several years. However, she was unable to provide him with a permanent home. Through extensive matching efforts, a permanent resource family, Ellen and Ben, was located who not only adopted this youth but also embraced his grandmother, Wanda, into their family as well.

Wanda: When we weren't sure what was going to happen with E, I prayed that God would give us a family that would want me in his life, and he did. I feel so blessed to have all of them in my life because I didn't lose my grandson. I gained an extended family. I get pictures of them having a fun day out, and we also went to the park for lunch together. I feel that God led us to these wonderful people in his life. He is so happy that I am going to spend the holidays with all of them. Ellen met part of my family, and they fell in love with her. E has grown a lot since he has moved in with them. I'm so happy and blessed that they include me in his life so much!



Ellen and Ben: My husband and I come from families where family isn't bound by DNA but by love and support. When we began the process of become a matching foster resource, we really hoped we could build a positive relationship with the families of the kids we'd be matched with. Adoptees and former foster youth who have shared their stories and experiences consistently emphasize how important it is to them to have a positive relationship between their biological and adopted family.

When we met E the first time, we were smitten. He is fun, imaginative, energetic... the list goes on! "Do you want to come to his birthday party?" asked Rhonda, the county matching caseworker, 2 days after we had met E for the first time. "It'll be at his Gram's house." With zero hesitation, my husband and I replied, "Absolutely!" We felt incredibly honored and grateful for his Gram Wanda's generosity in including us in that very special day. That invitation set the stage for our relationship—one where we three would band together to collaborate and communicate with one another to support the transition of her amazing grandson into our home.

We are incredibly grateful for Wanda. Her focus is always on giving her grandson love and a sense of stability, support, and home. Last week after a fun morning of thrift store shopping and lunch with Wanda, her sister, and her sister's daughter, we talked about how much we

appreciated one another and our newly expanded family. “After all,” I said, “who else would think E is as adorable, smart, hilarious, and sweet as we do *but* his grandma?!? She’s the perfect person to share every picture and story with!”

As we look forward to the holiday season, we’re excited to add two more seats around the table for many years to come for E and Wanda.



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