

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

### Fostering Unconditional Love

When Sherrika learned she had a young cousin in foster care, she and her husband immediately contacted social services and expressed their desire to adopt. “We trusted who Cierra was with,” Sherrika said. “But we wanted her to be with family.”



At the time, Sherrika and George had already adopted two children and fostered a third. They were able to expedite Cierra’s adoption through a process called Kinship Care, which places youth in foster care with relatives or close family friends.

Caring for kids is what Sherrika and George do, so they were especially glad to be able to care for a kid who’s also kin. “It’s best to keep the bonds of family strong,” Sherrika said.

Cierra thought it was best, too. “When I learned it was someone I knew,” she said, “I was happy to go live with them.”

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#### *Gentle People are Sometimes Best Equipped to Handle Tough Situations*

It was 2007 when Sherrika was told she couldn’t have children, but she and George weren’t going to let that stop them from building a family of their own. Instead, they dutifully researched alternatives. When they learned about UMFS and fostering to adopt, they were all in.

The day they met their first foster placement is a day they remember well. “When we first got to the hospital and laid eyes on DJ, he was there with a whole bunch of tubes in him,” George said.

Sherrika and George admitted to being overwhelmed, but it turned out the conditions were right for unconditional love. “We took a step back and said ‘OK, we can do this,’” George said. The couple stayed by DJ’s side, watched over him, and nurtured him. “We rubbed his feet to make sure he kept breathing,” George said.

Once a fragile newborn, DJ is now a healthy pre-teen and has since been reunited with his birth mother. Sherrika and George remain very involved as godparents, as well as mentors. “If his mom has a problem, she knows she can call on us,” Sherrika said.

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### *The Idea of Adoption Was Almost Instantaneous*

Sherrika and George met Mary and Nicholas on a Monday in 2009. On Friday, the siblings stayed the night. “And they were moving in the following weekend,” George said.

“Me and Mary bonded right away,” Sherrika added. Nicholas, however, had a difficult time warming up. It’s not uncommon for children in foster care to shy away from foster parents. Children don’t resist because they’re ungrateful; they resist because they’ve been traumatized.

“You have to develop a tough skin,” Sherrika said. “Nicholas was 5 and Mary was 7, and we were their third foster placement. I knew they’d been through a lot. It was confusing for them, but there’s nothing a little love can’t cure.”

Sherrika and George ultimately adopted Nicholas (now 17) and Mary (18). All of Nicholas’ earliest anxieties have long been forgotten, as evidenced by a message he recently sent George.

“I’ve got to show you this text,” George said proudly as he thumbed through his cell phone. “Nick sent this the other day: *‘Thank you again, Dad. I really and honestly appreciate what you are doing for me. None of this would have been possible without you. You are the best father I could ever wish for.’*”

Sherrika and George are foster parents with UMFS. To learn more about how to become a foster parent with UMFS, visit its [website](#).



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