

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

A Serendipitous Match

Mara is a happy, inquisitive, animated 9-year-old girl trying to enjoy summer with her two dads, adoptive parents Daniel, a high school English and film teacher and Anthony, a data analyst.

Like the rest of the country, Mara's summer looks different this year, but not just because of the COVID-19 pandemic. She finally has a place to call home with Anthony and Daniel after a long, emotional journey through several foster care homes on the road to permanent placement.

Mara was referred to Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK) in 2018 in the hopes of finding a home that would meet her complex needs as she progressed in age. WWK is part of a 10-year permanency initiative that is a collaboration between the Children's Home Society of Washington (CHSW), Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, and the Department for Children, Youth and Families in Washington State. Since the launch of the initiative, CHSW has served more than 289 children, matched 141 children pending adoptions, and assisted in facilitating over 35 adoptions.

Mara entered the foster care system in 2014 and experienced many placements in foster and group homes. During her time in care, Mara excelled in school and took an interest in helping others while working with various members of her case management team to address behavioral issues and trauma-related stress.

Daniel and Anthony first met Mara in May 2019. Longing for a family of their own, the couple had considered adoption for some time prior to finding Mara. They felt an immediate draw to her when they came across her profile online. "We always talked about adoption as something in the future," Daniel said. "One day we just said, 'why not now?' Mara was our first inquiry; it was serendipitous."

Her profile underscored that an ideal placement would be in a home supportive of her gender identity because it would allow for the family to help her explore with a deeper level of empathy, noting that she often depicted herself in drawings as a girl and expressed on several occasions that she was a girl. During this process, she came out as a transgender girl. "We were drawn to her from the moment we found her profile online, and we were completely taken by her once we met in person," Daniel said. "We are excited to be able to provide a loving, safe home for her to thrive in as she grows up."

Christy, Mara's CHSW WWK adoption recruiter affectionately refers to Mara as an intelligent, spunky young girl whose infectious spirit positively impacts everyone she meets. As part of Mara's care team, she provided support for Mara and her now-adoptive parents every step of the way, including adoption preparation work leading up to the adoption finalization.



Based in Idaho, Daniel and Anthony traveled to Washington state to meet the child who would ultimately become their family. Due to complications around the COVID-19 pandemic, the finalization of the placement and adoption took longer than expected. “The hardest part about the process was the wait,” Daniel recounted. “After Mara came to us for the trial period, it was an excruciating wait for her to return. Every time we spoke with her, she asked when she could come back, and we just weren’t sure how long it would take given the pandemic. We were all anxious to be together again.”

Even though the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted other organizations in maintaining services, WWK continues to operate in this virtual environment, where recruiters are meeting with children and youth via phone calls and Skype, and actively looking for permanent placements. At the beginning stages of the pandemic in March there were 210 children enrolled in the program; from March through May, 17, children were matched with pre-adopt families and 16 adoptions have been finalized.

Mara loves to play dress up, proclaims every color of the rainbow is her favorite, and enjoys spending quality time with her dads, playing games, exploring the outdoors, watching shows and being a family. Her dads ensure Mara remains connected with her grandmother, who spent Christmas 2019 with them in Idaho.

Mara’s adoption finalized in June 2020. Daniel and Anthony sought to make the moment memorable by compiling a video with messages from her case workers and select friends and family.

Learn more about the Children’s Home Society of Washington on its [website](#).



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