

Adolescents Need Adoptive Families Too!

By Arleta James, PCC

November is Adoption Awareness Month—a time to raise awareness about adoption, adoptive families and the children who are in need of adoptive homes. This post is written to heighten the need for families for our oldest American Orphans.

The mention of “adolescents” often makes adults cringe! We seem to think of them as an unruly group—dressing outrageously, listening to weird music and allowing raging hormones to run rampant! Really folks! We were all teens once, and we made it on to be productive members of society!



Unfortunately, many of our American orphans won't be so fortunate! There are currently 114,556 “waiting” American children—22% are adolescents (AFCARS #17.) This translates into 25, 631 adolescents—children—in need of homes! Yes, adolescents are still children! They still need parents! How sad that at the age of 13, 14, or 15, you are considered “too old” by many to join a family!

The end result of this thinking may mean leaving foster care with no parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunt, uncles and so on! It may also mean exchanging one system for another! That is, the teen who reaches adulthood—on his or her own—is more likely to become incarcerated or homeless within 18 months of discharge from foster care. More than 1/3, of this family-less group, has not completed high school. They have more mental health issues than others in the same age group. They are much more likely to have been pregnant and to carry the pregnancy to term. More than 1/3 has been physically or sexually victimized. If employed, their wage does not allow for being self-sufficient.

1 Arleta James, PCC, ABC of Ohio, 440-230-1960, arletajames@gmail.com, www.arletajames.com, *Welcoming a Brother or Sister by Adoption: From Navigating New Relationships to Building a Loving Family* (Jessica-Kinsley Publishers - <http://www.jkp.com/>, 2013)

Perhaps, “waiting families” could consider the following advantages of adopting an adolescent,

- Adolescents often come with a lot of background information. Potential adopters can gain a clear picture of the issues that will arrive along with the teen son or daughter. There will be psychological evaluations, psychiatric reports, IEP’s, social worker reports and therapist accounts. There will be lots of people to talk with—teachers, counselors, foster parents, foster siblings, coaches and more! “Yes”, these oldest children will come with “baggage.” **But, age isn’t a predictor of outcome.** You can read my series or articles, *Why Love Isn’t Enough: The Potential Risks Involved in Adopting from Home or Far Away*, and understand that all adoptions—infant through adolescent—involve risk! Information, knowing as much as you can about what you may be in for, making an informed choice—these factors contribute more fully to post-adoption satisfaction and success.
- These kids will also come with interests! Immediately you can start playing basketball, sewing, cooking, putting a few holes, taking trips to museums, or enjoying a burger and fries while discussing their latest career plan! Keep in mind that many adolescents often change interests as they mature. This is true for birth, step or adopted teens. Being flexible, having the motivation to try new activities or learning to enjoy things you might otherwise never have considered is essential when bringing an older child into the home.
- Those familiar with the teen—pre-adoption—can become a support system. For example, the former foster mother knows the clothing sizes, favorite foods and, of course, the good and bad habits of the older child. She can pass along behavioral management strategies, and homework tips. She can be a source of comfort on troubling days, or provide a break from time to time. The teen is often involved with a host of professionals as well. Any, who have an established relationship with the teen, may prove to be helpful after the adoption. Certainly, the adoptive parents are the child’s parents! Yet, facilitating past positive relationships lessens the trauma for any child, while expanding the resources for the adoptive family.
- The majority of American children are eligible for adoption subsidy. This includes a health insurance benefit and a monthly payment that extends through the child’s 18th birthday (age 21 in some circumstances.) These monies allow all families access to adopting foster children, and a monthly payment helps cover the costs associated with the needs the child presents. If you think you can’t afford an adolescent, or any child, financial help is available. A more complete explanation of [subsidy benefits](#) can be located via the North American Council on Adoptable Children. Please make sure you check out their report, *The Value of Adoption Subsidies: Finding Permanent Families for Children*.

In conclusion, imagine the frightening scenario of achieving adulthood and being out on your own! How would you make it? As you choose a son or daughter for your family, keep in mind our oldest American kids are a viable option! As with any adoption, prospective parents are encouraged to read, read and read some more! Start with [Parenting Adopted Adolescents](#) by [Gregory C. Keck](#). Network with veteran adoptive families—online and in-person. Locate professional help prior to the adoption. Understand your health insurance benefits—medical and mental health. Negotiate the best possible subsidy agreement and understand your rights regarding adoption subsidy. Always ask, “Are ‘we’/ Am ‘I’”, the family for this child? Adoption is about the kids, and being a permanent family for a child in need—young and older alike!

References:

AFCARS #17 http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report17.htm

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