

Have you ever wondered what a journey in foster care and adoption might look like?



Here's one Mom's story...

When I was little, I wanted to live in a Willow tree. I shared my plans with my mother, detailing how we would be able to place different necessary items, sleep, etc. In my young brain it made perfect sense, but the reality was, no Willow tree would be my home. Still, I clung to the safety of trees throughout my childhood (which was wrought with intense trauma, abuse, and ultimately triumph). When I was a teen, despite my rough exterior, and black sheep label, I knew caring for others was my calling. I had an ongoing dream where I was a “mom to many”—messy hair, askew clothes, children hanging off every inch of my body and others clamoring for a spot, but I stood there with the biggest smile I could make—it was pure joy. I never forgot that dream, even after my childbearing abilities were cut short after two boys, 12 years apart.

As I grew, my dream became like my Willow tree, and the branches extended to all kinds of caring for others, not just being a mom. Then in June 2020, a new branch sprouted, and rekindled that dream again. A younger mom I had met years earlier, and who I mentored as best I could, was met with the inability to parent her child. We were called to step-in as fictive kin and thus, started our family's foster journey.

When we first said “yes” to stepping in for that young girl and her mother, we had no clue about licensing, agencies, the world of foster care (outside of a few friends and media coverage, neither of which were educational). Being in the thick of the pandemic, we also

didn't have a lot of contacts publicly open for our inquiries. That is where Catholic Charities came into our story. We had called every agency, including DHS, and left messages, seeking someone to walk us through to get licensed and remain the caregivers for our newest family member, so unsure about next steps. Catholic Charities was the first (and only for about 2 months) to respond in late August. We met with the Licensing Director, who asked if we would consider being a foster home, not just getting licensed for our single child. My husband and I prayed about it and really felt that this was a calling for our family and said yes. The process felt like a million sheets of paper, but we had lots of support for questions and answers through it all. In early 2021, we became officially licensed and had our second placement by June. And then another and another, with the ever-changing total, and at seven additional children placed in our home since 2021. Of those, two ended in adoption in 2022 and 2023. All were worth every single second.

I would never, in my wildest of dreams, have imagined the life we live today. Caring for others doesn't just include the kids we foster, it extends to birth parents, first families, siblings, and so many others that the world of foster care touches. It is not what I would call a "dream" every day, but I would not make a different decision today, knowing what I know. My heart is where we are called, and while not every child who enters our home stays, or even returns to their parents, they are given that "willow tree" safety and space to heal while here. It is an absolute joy to see even a small amount of growth in the children, and sometimes even their birth parents.

If you have the capacity to love your family, you have the capacity to be a foster parent!

There is always a fear of heartache, but that is a reality in any situation where human connection is involved, and yet we still marry, birth, and love others each and every day. I think the most rewarding part of this is that it isn't about me, or us, it is about someone else. That we are fostered by the kids, and their lives, as much as they are by us—you can't help but be better because of them.

Because of Catholic Charities, our family has grown to include so many others. Some forever, some for mere moments, but always for the better. We have had great case workers, our agency is responsive and supportive, and I would recommend them to anyone who asks. If you have ever considered fostering, please reach out. Your life tree deserves the opportunity to branch out!

We are here for you!

Contact our Child Welfare department at 517.295.3334 to find out more, have your questions answered, or start your fostering journey today. More information can also be found on our website at: <https://catholiccharitiesjlhc.org/foster-care-adoption/>