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856 Words

Saving Society's Lost Children

Envision a life where bruises, welts, broken bones, scarring, molestation, hurtful words are an everyday reality, an unimaginable subsistence where you, at five years old, are your own sole provider to assure you eat, bathe, sleep because your true caretakers exist in a drunken, drugged, abusive stupor, if even around.

A little girl cowers in the corner of the dirty couch, pale face half-hidden under matted hair, skin a pattern of discolored purples and blues into yellow; cigarette burns hide beneath a faded oversized tee shirt.

Suddenly, a gentle hand reaches towards her to remove her from the ugliness. She flinches because kindness is unfathomable and a hand coming towards her usually ends in pain. Picture her tiny hands clutching her meager belongings, climbing into the back seat of a car and watching the hell that was her only home and everything that she has ever known disappear from view.

Now imagine the opportunity to teach that little girl how to redefine love- a love that doesn't equate with pain- for the very first in her life.

A foster parent for four and a half years and proud Daddy to three adopted sons, Tod Jeffers has been President of Pasco County Foster and Adoptive Association nearly two years. His mission is to share the 'good' about foster parenting. "We are branding our association and formalizing a 501(C)3 specifically for our organization. Our mission is to provide quality training, support and activities for our foster and adoptive families."

Jeffers admits one of the most fulfilling aspects of his role in PCFAPA is "being able to help families." He gives an example of an email from a harried foster parent easily resolved, foster kids coming in with smiles on their faces. "These kids need a fair opportunity, a good chance at life. As long as a good opportunity to excel exists – that's the best part of it. We love, care, laugh with and encourage our children – show them what being a kid all is about." For many children simply being a kid a new experience.

PCFAPA has partnered with several organizations to provide fun and safe activities for the foster and adoptive children in their care. These special events include a Skating Party, Open House, St. Leo Christmas Celebration, Halloween Celebration, Angel Tree Program, Apple Tree (Back to School) Program, Splash Bash, to name a few. "We are registering for our Fore Families Golf Tournament (adult foursome scramble/putting for kids) coming up on June 6 at the Crescent Oaks Country Club in Tarpon Springs," invites Jeffers. Volunteer and registration information can be found at www.pascofapa.com.

Though surely no system is perfect, Jeffers is trying to change the face of foster parenting. “There’s a false perception that foster parents force their foster kids to live in small, cramped houses with no room to move, much less run and play.” The media tends to regurgitate a bad story of foster care rather than focus on the many wonderful things foster parents do to help abused and neglected children get acclimated to their new lives.

“Fostering is a great thing,” says Jeffers. “Loving people put their hearts on the line for these children every single day. They are to be commended, not chastised.”

Unfortunately there is still a shortage of foster homes. “With 900 kids in care, there are less than 100 foster homes in Pasco and approximately 200 homes in Pinellas,” explains Jeffers. Unplaced children, unless adopted or reunited with other family members, can spend the remainder of their childhood in group and shelter homes.

“It’s so easy for people to get involved. Although older people do an exceptional job with these kids, young professionals are now fostering children. We get people from all different economic classes and education levels. All that matters is your capacity to love a child.”

To become a foster parent, you must be 21 years old or older, have stable, appropriate housing and space (a bed for each child you will foster or adopt), and be able to pass a fingerprint background check along with all other adults in your home as well as a home study.

“There’s a preliminary call, after which you are invited to an orientation meeting followed by special training called MAPP (*Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting*).”

Several other ways are available to volunteer to help the PCFAPA organization. Respite care workers, tutors and mentors, volunteers for events are always needed and welcomed. All volunteers go through the same screening process.

If someone is more interested in providing a permanent adoptive home to a foster child that has been through TPR (termination of parental rights), Jeffers recommends contacting the Eckerd Community Alternatives Toll Free Recruitment line at 866-233-0790 or visiting www.HeartGalleryTampaBay.org, a wonderful showcase of adoptable children, whose goal is to raise awareness and education about the hundreds of children who desperately need placement. Two hundred and forty five children are waiting for their forever homes.

Whether you choose to foster, adopt or simply volunteer, Jeffers sums up the reason for the PCFAPA: “You can never have too many people love too many kids.”