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## NEWS

# 7,000 children wait for adoption Couples share their stories

By Rachael Williams  
Metroland Media Group

Two Halton brothers were separated before they were old enough to walk. Another teenager lived in more than 20 different houses before he finally found a home. These three boys had faced deprivation, neglect and emotional trauma in their lives. Now, they eat healthy dinners, go on vacations and, most importantly, they rest their heads on their own pillow every night.

"They now have a family connection. They're finally home," said Lynne Rheault, adoption supervisor with the Halton Children's Aid Society (CAS).

2014 marked the 100th anniversary of the Children's Aid Society of Halton. To celebrate, adoptive parents came forward to share their special stories. One story centres around two boys who were separated for their own welfare before the age of two and placed into foster care for neglected children. The abandonment they had faced required them to receive individual attention. This meant separate homes.

The second involves a disadvantaged 15-year-old who bounced around from house to house, falling behind in school, getting into trouble and being unable to trust any adult figure or forge personal relationships.

The stories of how these three boys were placed into the care of adopting families are ones that showcase the importance of the CAS, as well as the benefits of a stable home and a loving support system.

"It's a beautiful bond. It's something these... boys are going to have forever. It's something we want to encourage and help maintain," said Anthony, adoptive father of one of the brothers.

Anthony and Jennifer, whose last names and the names of the children can't be revealed for confidentiality reasons, adopted one of the two siblings when he was three years old. He has just turned five and is thriving in school and at home. Mark and Joseph adopted the other sibling at the same age. He's now four and the two parents finally feel like their family is complete.

"Mark and I have a wonderful relationship and both of us couldn't imagine our lives not being able to share what we had with a child," said Joseph.

As a result of the boys needing specialized parenting, they were — and continue to be — cared for in separate residences. However, once they were paired with families in stable homes, they could resume regular contact via an arrangement the CAS refers to as 'openness'. This requires some degree of contact between adopted children, their birth families, or other

individuals with whom the children have had significant relationships prior to adoption.

"We recognized right from the beginning how close these boys were. They adore each other. They didn't see each other that much in foster care, but just witnessing how connected they have become is unbelievable," said Jen.

Since then, the families have travelled together to Tennessee, went on summer day trips and they get together for dinner a few times a month. As a result, the brothers have a renewed sense of camaraderie and protectiveness over each other.

"He calls his brother 'mine.' He really feels like his brother is a part of him in a way," said Joseph.

Duncan's adoptive son moved in with him when he was 14. He could barely read and write, he got picked on in school and from a behavioural standpoint, he acted like he was three-years-old. Now, he is up to a Grade 3 level academically, he participates in extracurricular activities and has become a mature young adult.

"He has the support to think about finishing school, have a family, get a job. He has someone to believe in him," said Duncan.

Duncan is one of the few who adopted his son past the peak adoption years (ages 0-5). In Halton, 75 per cent of the children in care are 13 years and older. His experience with the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Hamilton and Burlington led him to develop relationships with older boys

who were without a father figure.

"They didn't call me dad or anything, but they certainly called me first if they needed to talk about something. I had a great relationship with them. I knew a lot of older kids are stuck in foster care forever and I wanted to help," he said.

All of the aforementioned parents went through the Halton CAS to adopt. The CAS provided training, in-depth evaluations, information sessions, funding options and support systems to help these boys thrive.

"These kids have been through a lot of loss and so they really need supports in place. Parents really need specialized training too to know what these kids need," said Rheault.

Jen said that in the first few months of her adopted son living with the family, he was very quiet. Concerns were raised about his development, as he was well over a year behind in almost every area — from speech and language to physical development. Jen took 10 months off work and spent that time helping him acclimate to his new environment.

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they really need supports in  
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— Lynne Rheault, CAS adoption supervisor —