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Group provides support for parents with adopted children

Many share similar experiences

By Sabrina Byrnes
SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

Parents and children who have been touched by adoption can embrace a sense of belonging as they share their stories and experiences with other families in similar situations.

'Belonging' is the name of a support group for parents with adopted children that was started by Janice McDonald of Burlington.

McDonald, who has two adopted children, Mark, 19, and Karen 17, started the group because she felt there was a need for a support system. She envisioned a group of people coming together to give encouragement and support to others who have shared the same experiences.

"It's being together with others that have an understanding, and we're all sort of going through the same thing," said McDonald, commenting on the importance of the group.

"Unless you have an adopted child, you don't understand."

McDonald said there are unique problems faced by adopted children because they deal with rejection issues, which can lead to attachment disorder and other difficulties.

Some don't bond

In the same way that animals know their moms when they are born through their scent, McDonald said babies know their mothers, as well. From the first moment they're handed to their adoptive mom, they know that's not who they belong to,

said McDonald.

"From that moment when they know that that's not who they belong to, they make a subconscious decision that they are either going to bond or they're not," said McDonald, adding that while her son bonded, her daughter didn't.

She said she could never settle Karen as a baby, but she would calm right down when handed to her husband Scott.

"I used to think I just wore her out, that she was tired by the time he got her," said McDonald, later realizing that it was rejection issues.

Counseling beneficial

McDonald's children are both in counseling, which she feels is beneficial to all children who have been adopted.

Karen has difficulties getting close to anyone.

"I feel like I need to reject other people before they have a chance to reject me. I push people away, and I refuse to let people get really close to me, and I don't open up very easily," said Karen.

McDonald didn't have the help of a support group when she was raising her adopted children, but she did have the help of one couple, who became her mentors.

Although things are a little easier now, her journey wasn't always smooth. McDonald thought others could benefit from her experiences.

"I just thought that our road was a little bit bumpy, but doesn't that make somebody's road a little more even?" she said.

McDonald originally wanted the group to be for parents with adopted children but realized others could benefit as well. The group sessions have been joined by parents looking to adopt, birth moms and people who had been adopted themselves.

"It's for anyone that has been touched by adoption," she said.

McDonald and her husband told their children when they were three that they were adopted, but they don't think the kids really understood until they were about six or seven.

Karen spoke at the last meeting of 'Belonging' about her experiences with being adopted, and spoke about the positives and negatives of the situation.

"My mom was really young when she had me, she was like 17, 18, the age I am now, so she wouldn't have been able to give me a real good life," said Karen.

She added that her birth mother would have probably had to drop out of school and wouldn't have been able to get a good job.

"The fact that she cared enough to do what was best for me, that's positive," said Karen.

"The negatives is that I have issues with trusting people, and mom and I have had problems in the past. I'm pretty open about it, but it's difficult to talk about the hurt. I don't trust people because it's difficult to explain it. No one really understands."

As a child, Karen was teased and called names because she was adopted. She also has difficulties with the unanswered questions in her life.

"It's just difficult not to know

• see 'BELONGING' on page A14



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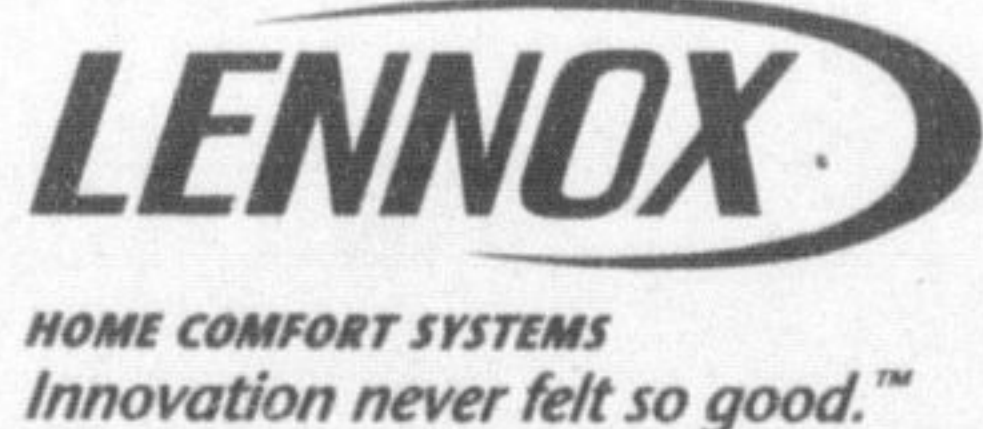
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