

OUR FAMILY STORY

ASIAN FOSTER FAMILY INITIATIVE



Stories of our Resource Families and Foster Children

This book tells the story of Resources families as they begin a new journey opening up their homes to a foster child. Through these stories, we are offered a glimpse into their world and into the lives of the children who will grow and learn to be loved in these homes.

We hope you cherish these stories as much as we do. They are filled with special moments of connection, laughter, and tears. They are a momento of how both the lives of the foster families and children are immeasurably changed for the better.

CONTENT:

- 02 I WILL CALL YOU MOM
- 04 THREE MONTHS OF BLESSINGS
- 05 A LOVING MEMORY
- 07 A GRANDFATHER FOR THREE SIBLINGS
- 08 MANY DREAMS TO ACHIEVE
- 09 SEEING THE WORLD CLEARLY
- 10 FULL OF LOVE

I Will Call You Mom

By Resource Parent Christine

The motivation for starting this work circles back to when my daughter was 16. We wanted us to become a foster family so we went to a briefing session with her at the Korean church. We found out that there was a training conducted in Korean and from there, my husband and I received education about what it takes to become resource parents.

After this initial education, we started the process of becoming a Resource Family. We continued reading educational materials and went through stacks of paperwork each night. There were some difficult parts. Sometimes I wanted to give up. But my husband encouraged me, saying, "Let's endure a little longer." My daughter smiled up at me as we worked through the paperwork together, giving me strength.

Because we persevered, we became the first trained group to receive our approval and a foster child. When we were waiting for our foster child, we were almost matched with kids twice but they both fell through for one reason or another.

Once, we spent all day preparing the home because we were told a child was coming, but they did not arrive. Our hearts grew heavy and we started to believe we would never be matched. But we continued to wait.

One day, we received a call that an eight-year-old boy was in need of a Korean home. With the strong recommendation of DCFS, he joined our home. My family greeted this child with excitement and anticipation. The child was quiet and calm, but his eyes showed a tenderness and hope.

On the second day of joining our family, I asked what he wanted to call us.

He didn't answer for a while so I suggested, "Mrs.", "Aunt", "Teacher" or "Mom". I asked what he would like to call me but he didn't respond. I concluded that "Aunt" would be the best choice. But he never called me "Auntie".

So I asked him again what he wanted to call me. "Do you want to call me Auntie?" I asked. He shook his head. His voice quieted to whisper and he said, "Mom."

I was surprised, but pretended not to be. My daughter and I supported his decision and he liked it.

That day I truly became a Resource Mother. Before my daughter left for college, she helped me a lot and he began to view my daughter as his sister. When she left, he was very sad about her leaving home and missed her a lot.

I raised this child with the same mind as I raised my biological child. We were a family and lived our lives like any other household. I think it would have been very hard to do this work if one of my family members didn't have the same mindset. Luckily, my daughter and husband cared so deeply for the little boy and their love was reciprocated by him.

"Do you want to call me Auntie?", I asked. He shook his head. His voice quieted to whisper and he said, "Mom".



One day, I received a phone call from his school. The teacher told me he was in trouble because he was talking and wasn't listening to the lesson. When we picked him up from school, my daughter and I asked him what happened at school. He replied that nothing happened.

My daughter thought she should teach him not to lie so she talked to him and tried to persuade him to be honest. Suddenly, he began to cry.

When she asked him why he was crying, he cried without answering. My daughter told him it's not a big problem to talk to your friends at school and not listen to teacher. She told him she did same thing when she was younger. But she told him that it is not okay to lie. She gave him a big hug and he stopped crying.

He admitted his mistake and since then, he did not lie to us again.

Every night, my husband and I took turns praying with him before he went to sleep, saying good night, and saying 'I love you'. He would not reply back to us. He seemed a little embarrassed as if he never heard those words from anyone before. As time went by, he not only told us that he loved us but he said "I love you more."

He not only told us that he loved us, but he said "I love you more."



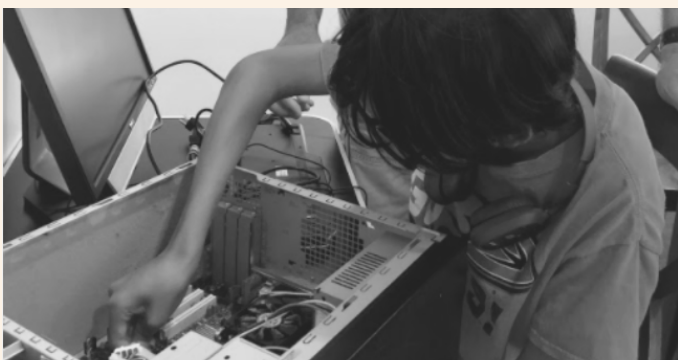
Three Months of Blessings

By Resource Parent Jen

Today is the last day as Daniel and Sarah's Resource Parents and I wanted to provide our final sharing from the kids' stay with us. I'd like to think we were strict but that the kids learned a lot and had fun during their brief, almost 3 months, stay with us.

Daniel had several goals when he arrived, both short term and long term. We found out he wanted to learn how to swim, build a computer, and eventually become a game coder when he grows up. In support of his goals, we taught him how to swim in my mom's backyard pool, acquired a used desktop computer that he disassembled and put back together with my husband's assistance, and signed him up for an introductory virtual 1-on-1 coding class. In that class, he learned that he needed to learn Javascript and with my help, he selected a Kids Javascript book on Amazon that he purchased with his allowance. His amazing firsts with us included learning how to ride a bicycle, using his Resource Dad's power tools to build our new greenhouse (he loves to build things!), riding a pogo stick, tasting a plum, learning how to rollerblade, making chicken taquitos from scratch, and building a marble run. Two of the things we tried to impress upon him during his stay were

- 1) it's sometimes okay to take care of himself before he takes care of others and
- 2) to ask for help from trusted adults when he needs it. When he arrived he wasn't reporting Sarah's hitting behavior to us, but I am proud to say that before he left us, he was disciplining her appropriately, and informing us of her behavior.



Sarah arrived unable to recite the alphabet past letter "F", unable to count, and unable to identify her name or any letters or numbers. She also arrived with a repetitive throat clearing tic and was on the heavier set for her height and age. We began singing the ABC song with her and playing it repetitively on the home sound system. She can now recite the entire alphabet clearly and accurately! We also started counting objects with her and incorporating counting in her discipline. She can now count to 15 unassisted and to 20 with assistance. I labeled some of her belongings and she can now identify the first three letters of her name when side by side with the other kids' names. We got preschool tracing books for her and she completed an entire alphabet tracing book.

The throat clearing that was persistent for a couple months is completely gone, which may have been psychological or caused by her weight. With daily outdoor exercise (biking, walking, swimming, playing tag) and very little TV or candy (but dessert every night!), Sarah lost over 7 lbs. During her time with us, she enjoyed painting and crafts (which she said she had never done before), playing "pretend" with our outdoor kitchen toys and her dolls, and collecting caterpillars and playing with our chickens. Swimming was her favorite activity.

Our hope is that both kids have fond memories with us filled with first time experiences from making shrinkydinks, having In-n-Out, to making their first s'mores, and releasing monarchs from our butterfly habitat. We hope that they are well cared for and we will cherish our time with them dearly.

A Loving Memory

By Resource Parent Amy

When the doctor first told me that I could not get pregnant again, I felt devastated. My child was the only child, and he often felt lonely. Thus, when I found out about the extreme need for Chinese resource families, my husband and I signed up with KFAM. I wanted to help out my community and I hoped to adopt a baby girl so that my son could have a sibling.

Initially, when Emily and Bella's case came to me, I didn't think I could handle a teenager. However, KFAM and DCFS told me that it would be better for the siblings to be together, so I agreed to take in Emily as well.

We treated Bella, the baby infant, like a princess. At first, Bella cried a lot. Her previous home with her birth parents had been unstable and unsafe. After a week of constant care, Bella slowly adjusted to the family. My son also loved his foster sister a lot. He gave her everything, from his toys to his food, while my husband, who worked the whole day, would come home and immediately asked to hold Bella.

Emily, on the other hand, was a typical teenager. She was also a gamer girl. She had recently relocated to the US with her family so she was still learning English. Furthermore, she had to move to a new school near my house, so it was very challenging for her to adapt to the new situation.



"I wanted to give them my full attention and love"

In the beginning, she fought with me a lot. Emily thought that I only cared about Bella, so she got jealous of the attention Bella received. Emily often threatened to eat Bella's food, and at one point threatened to kill herself during a fight with me. I was flabbergasted. I did not know how to break through to Emily nor did I understand why a teenager her age would be jealous of a baby let alone her own sibling. Why would anyone want to eat baby food!?

I quickly called my KFAM social worker and expressed my frustrations. Seeing that Emily needed help, KFAM social worker immediately referred Emily for counseling services. Slowly, Emily's mood and behaviors improved, and, after a few months of adjusting, Emily's grades also improved at school.

Perhaps the hardest for me were the birth parents. I must monitor the visits with birth parents 2 to 3 times a week which took up a lot of time. Furthermore, their mother was paranoid about her child being taken away, and she always said harsh words to me. However, I chose to ignore the hurtful words in order to think about the children's situation. I wanted to give them my full attention and love.





After they left, I thought a lot about the year that had passed by so quickly. Although I am saddened by their sudden absence, I feel that my time with Bella and Emily was an opportunity to create very loving memories.

Since they left, I have met them once again when their birth parents dropped them off to visit.

Bella started crawling toward her old room as soon as we brought her there. As for Emily, we prepared so much of her favorite foods that she couldn't eat anymore.

In that sense, whatever Emily wanted or needed as a teenager, I wanted to give it to her. When Emily wanted to learn how to ride a bike, I bought Emily a bike. When Emily expressed interest in computer science, I found an after school program for her, and drove her to class every Saturday. On one special holiday, our family planned to go out to a fancy restaurant, and Emily didn't want to go at first. When I probed, Emily said she did not have any fancy clothing and did not want to be embarrassed. After hearing this, I took Emily to buy plenty of pretty dresses. Sitting in the back of the car, Emily quietly said, "Thank you. No one has ever treated me this well before." It was hard for Emily to express her feelings, so hearing her saying this made my day.

A whole year passed, and we started to treat each other like family. There were lots of movie nights with the adults, game nights, and laughter and jokes in between. Suddenly, COVID-19 hit and it was too complicated for Bella and Emily to stay with us. The court ordered them to go back home.



A Grandfather for Three Siblings

by Resource Parent Robert

Before becoming a resource parent, I was a teacher who loved working with children. As a child, I had grown up in Taiwan with an affectionate family before moving to the US for my Masters. After retiring and sending my children to college at age 65, my wife and I started raising two dogs and two cats. One day, I saw KFAM's advertisement for foster parents and immediately thought, "If I can raise cats and dogs, then why not kids? These kids need my help more."

My wife and I applied to be foster parents. Eventually, we took in three siblings as our first case. We originally wanted to take in only one child, but seeing that the three siblings have been separated in previous foster homes, I decided to open my home to all three so they have a chance to be together.

It was not easy for us to take care of all three young children at once. My wife was working full time, and at one point, she went back to Taiwan to visit her family. Initially, the youngest child would wake up crying from nightmares, causing the other children to wake up as well. Wanting to comfort them, I moved my bed to the living room so that they can find me faster for comfort. After nights of holding and rocking the child back to sleep and weekly therapist sessions, the youngest child was able to fall asleep soundly. However, the troubles didn't end there. One night, the eldest child had a terrible stomachache and I had to take him to the emergency room immediately. What was thought to be indigestion suddenly became appendicitis and the hospital transferred him to a children's hospital. Within one hour, we were told he needed surgery meaning that within one hour, his birth father needed to come and sign the consent form. At this point, my mind flew into panic mode and I quickly called our KFAM social worker for help. I attempted to contact his birth father multiple times for the surgery, while KFAM staff called DCFS for instructions.



Luckily, his birth father came just in the nick of time to sign the consent form. I decided to stay in the hospital until 4AM to allow his birth father to stay with him after the surgery ended as birth father was not allowed to be alone with the child. At 7AM, I returned to the hospital to take care of him and brought his twin sisters who could not be left at home alone. While it was difficult to deal with all of this sudden stress, it was necessary for his health and I would have done anything for him.

Despite all of the struggles that came up, I enjoyed hearing their laughter and interacting with them. The three siblings and I walked the dogs everyday together, sometimes even staying to play at the playground. I wanted the best for these children so I did everything I could to give them "normal experiences." During Christmas, my eldest son came back to visit me and our family took the three siblings to Disneyland to have fun together. When the children could not go to a school's field trip because of legal reasons, I talked to our KFAM social worker and quickly got approval from DCFS to let the children go with their classmates. In allowing them to enjoy being kids, I gained their trust and love, becoming like a grandfather to them.

When the children reunited with their birth father nine months later, I continued to meet them weekly. Seeing me interact with the kids, the birth father asked for advice on dealing with children. I smiled and responded, "Set routines and make clear rules for the children. As long as they follow the rules, let them have the freedom to do what they want within those constraints, and they'll grow up just fine."

Many Dreams to Achieve

By Foster Teen Peter

Hello everyone, my name is Peter. I am 19 years old. I was born in the US, but I grew up living in China until I was 17 years old. My parents got divorced when I was a child and now they have passed away. The challenges of life have forced me to grow up quickly. Compared to my peers, I am more practical than naïve. Due to my legal status in China and my mother's illness, I dropped out of school when I was 16 years old. Nobody took care of me and my mother at the time. My elder sister found a 10 square meter house for me to live and I had to go outside to work and support myself and my mom. My mom died when I was 17.

Looking back, life in China was very hard for me. After my mother passed away, I decided to come to the US because I was born here and I wanted to continue my studies. It was difficult for me to make this decision because I have no relatives or friends in the US. However, in 2018, I finally made the decision to come to the place I was born.

A big problem for me at the time was that I couldn't speak English. I could not even communicate with the Customs officials, but thankfully, they still let me in. After that, I came to Los Angeles. Outside the airport, I found a taxi and told the driver to send me to Chinatown because I thought there would be more Chinese Americans and I could talk with them in my language.

When I arrived there, I found most of the stores and shops closed. There were very few people on the street. So, I decided to go to the police. I needed help.

At the police office, I tried my best to communicate with the officers, for example, using body language. I was transferred to a shelter and that's when I went into the foster system.

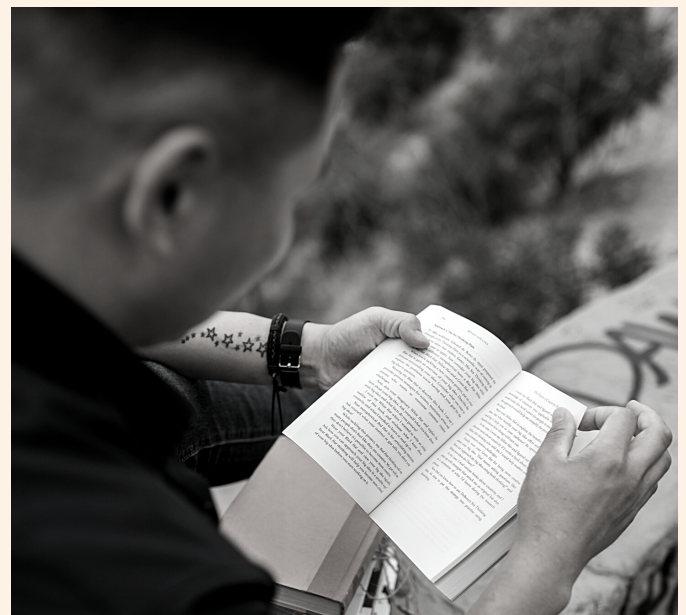
When I was first matched with a resource family, I felt excited but very nervous. I didn't stay there for too long. The cultural differences made it hard for me to get involved with that family. I was transferred to another Resource Family and have stayed there until now.

I love my current resource family. They have taught me a lot. I know how to take good care of myself in daily life. Not only that, I finished my high school studies within one year. I achieved A+ grades in all the subjects and had my name displayed on the honor wall. After that, I passed the GED exam and went to college successfully. I got all As in my first semester! Since I am especially good at math, I have been helping my foster sibling with math. I have also been playing Legos with him a lot since the pandemic started.

I had my walls up and would not communicate with my resource mother because I didn't think she cared about me, like the last resource home I went to. However, my resource mother told me repeatedly to tell her directly about the problems I have, and eventually I started confiding in her.

Now I am much more direct and open with the family.

I have many dreams that I want to achieve and I am so appreciative of my Resource Family for being a constant source of support and love.



Seeing the World Clearly By Foster Child Andrew

I have poor vision. At school, I could only make out the blurry face of the teacher and the faint handwriting on the whiteboard. I would fail my tests because I kept confusing the number 9 with the number 6. When I asked my father for a pair of eyeglasses, my father laughed. But quickly, the laugh turned into pure rage. My father accused me of lying, of making up stories so I could get out of studying. I tried to explain my poor eyesight: the blurry faces, the faint handwriting, the unclear numbers. But my father wouldn't hear it.

Instead, my father hit me. Once really hard and then again, a second time. I learned a lot that day. I learned how to be quiet, to lock my true feelings inside. I learned to never bring home my exams to avoid my father beating me at the sight of my low grades. I learned to live with blurry vision and bruised body parts. At eight years old, I learned how to no longer be a child.

One September day, I watched as my father grabbed my stepmother's head, pushed her onto the living room table, and into the wall. Though it was a blur, I could hear her cries telling him to stop. She wasn't my real mother. My father and mother moved to the United States when I was six years old. But suddenly, my mother left and when I asked where she went, if she'd ever come back, my father just shook his head. My father told me that my mother abandoned me and that she did not love me. Soon, I believed his lies to be the truth. My step mother wasn't my real mother, but nevertheless I cared for her and could not bear to hear her screams echoing through the house. That night, my stepmother, covered in blood and scarred, gained the strength to call the authorities and child protective services. I was separated from my father and moved in with a new family.

It was not easy at first. I had to pack up my things. I had to move schools and adapt to a new city. But the moment I met my Resource parents, I knew it would be okay. They promised me that nobody would hurt me ever again.

They embraced me with open arms and took me everywhere. We went out to dinner weekly and I discovered my love for Popeyes chicken sandwiches. On Thanksgiving, I spent time playing traditional Korean games with their extended family. Over Christmas break, we went to a special street where all the houses were adorned with bright lights and colorful decorations. Although the lights were fuzzy to me, it was still nothing I'd ever seen before.

With my Resource Parents, I was able to finally experience a normal childhood. But due to the court mandated visitations with my father, I wasn't truly able to escape my past. My father was a highly manipulative man who used his resources to get a strong legal team. During those visits with my father, my social worker told me that the moment I wanted to leave, all I had to do was squeeze her hand. Three minutes in to each visitation I would squeeze the social workers hand, making her come up with an excuse so we could leave. But my father complained to the court and the judge forebode me from leaving early so my father could see me for the full visit. Suddenly, I was no longer allowed to leave. My social worker tried to figure out a loophole, but there was no way out. When my social worker apologized to me and told me there was nothing she could do, I told her that I understood and I was going to be fine. I persevered, going to each visit with courage and confidence. Despite being a young, scared, boy on the inside, I stood up to my father.



I am not ashamed to be in foster care, but rather I am appreciative

My Resource Parents created a safe space for me to share my feelings about anything, especially about how I felt seeing my father. When they realized that I wasn't bringing home my exams, they sat me down and told me it was okay to be honest with them. I slowly admitted that I couldn't see. I hid my exams because I did not want to get punished for receiving a bad grade. My Resource mother told me that they would never do that to me. The next day she took me to get a pair of eyeglasses. After five months in their care, I was reunified with my biological mother. I learned that my mother never abandoned me and chose to keep me in the United States so that I could get a good education.

With my Resource Family, I learned what it was like to be loved. I learned how to share my feelings and be open. Most importantly, I learned how to be a child again.

I am not ashamed to be in foster care, but rather I am appreciative. Finally, I am able to see.



Full of Love

James's story by Resource Parent Hannah

White rice and gochujang chili paste. That was the meal James first requested when we asked him what he wanted for dinner. While I was confused, I realized James was simply reciting what he ate at home. As a young child, James was neglected by his mother. His mother struggled with mental illness and was incapable of taking care of herself, let alone her own child. His father left his mother. At just nine years old, James learned to fend for himself, searching through the house for food. If he was lucky, he would eat some rice with red chili paste. Oftentimes, most times it seemed, he went to bed hungry. James didn't know that other foods existed besides rice and gochujang. But he didn't mind, in fact, he was pretty happy with it. This meal was his escape, his comfort food, the only thing that made him feel full inside. But when he joined our home, he couldn't help but be intrigued at the wide array of food we indulged in each day. From Italian pizza to Korean barbeque, James wanted to try it all, and most importantly, he wanted it all for himself. James started hoarding his food.

Aside from being very possessive of his plate, he often waited to see what I was eating later so he could eat another meal. I grew more stressed as James continued to eat multiple dinners and portions that were too large, even for a grown adult. However, after talking with his social worker, I quickly realized what was happening -- James was eating his feelings away. Gaining a new perspective, I quickly came up with a way for James to find comfort outside of food. I created elaborate meal plans that I constructed out of colorful paper and adorned with gold borders. Each week I outlined the variety of home cooked meals James would be able to look forward to. I incorporated a diverse array of cuisines and healthy alternatives to show James how food is not something you should simply consume quickly, but instead appreciate and cherish. James favorite food became the beef brisket made from scratch with, of course, some rice and gochujang.

After school, we introduced James to sports so he could spend time outdoors and continue to stay active. James would play out in the backyard for hours, kicking the soccer ball around with his resource father or playing tag or hide and seek or whatever game they made up with his resource siblings. Sometimes, he would even forget about dinner, becoming too busy being a kid again to remember that it was time to eat.

When it grew cold outside, James continued to exercise, but this time he exercised his mind. When James expressed interest in building, we bought him a set of Legos where he was able to create the tallest skyscrapers and tiniest homes out of colorful rectangular blocks. He was able to bring to life all the structures he built in his mind.

When James was finally able to reunite with his biological father, he was happy and excited. Yet at the same time, filled with immense sorrow. We were a family together and we didn't want to say goodbye. But I assured him that he was going to be okay for now and he had all the ingredients to thrive. When we asked him what he wanted for his last meal with us, James smiled and said he was fine with anything. James was finally full. This time not with food but rather the love and care our family provided him.



James was finally full. This time not with food but rather the love and care that our family provided him.

If you would like to support KFAM, please click BELOW to donate!



Asian Foster Family Initiative (AFFI) is a foster family agency program of Korean American Family Services (KFAM). AFFI was launched in 2014 to fill the void of Asian foster families in greater Los Angeles. The program remains the only foster family agency in the U.S. that specializes on the needs of Asian foster children and families.