

Do You Want To Positively Impact the Life of a Child or Teen?



Meet Kevin.

Kevin is fifteen years old. He is a willful young man and has started his share of arguments in his lifetime.

This morning's argument with his foster mother is about having to wear a tie to his school concert. He insists that not everyone will wear one and he does not want to look different than his friends. He wants to fit in like everyone else. His foster mother is unyielding, and calmly speaks her peace and walks away. Kevin pleads with his foster father and hears in return: *"Do what your mother tells you. Go pick one of mine out of my closet and I'll help you with it."* Kevin submits and mumbles as he makes his way to his parents' room to pick out a tie. When Kevin and his foster father are done, his foster mother flashes a beaming smile, and wells up with prideful tears. Kevin mumbles, but a tiny smile forms on the side of his mouth, and he walks away to save face. Even after two years, and as connected as Kevin is to his foster family, he still would rather walk away when he sees his foster mother's tears. He has seen her

tears before, but they were not always tears of joy.

Kevin had a hard life. He was born prematurely to a mother addicted to crack cocaine. His first experiences of being held were in the hands of a nursing team. When he was able to leave the hospital, Kevin was placed by DSS with an aunt, while his mother recovered from her delivery and entered her third course of drug rehab. Kevin's aunt was only available to care for him for several months before he was placed in foster care. At one point, Kevin's mother completed her treatment and was able to have Kevin come live with her under the close supervision of the Department of Social Services. By the age of three, Kevin had made it back to the care of his mother and was living with her and several older brothers and sisters. Kevin's mother relapsed and began to invite strange men into the home. At various times, Kevin witnessed his mother in brutal, physical fights with men and police officers entering his home. Others in the neighborhood would see Kevin wandering the streets, a little boy in need of food and loving adult care. Someone in the neighborhood called the police when they saw him almost hit by a car. He was taken from his mother's care immediately and treated at the local hospital. During the course of his hospital evaluation, it was discovered that Kevin had been physically and sexually abused. Some of his injuries were clearly new, and others quite old. Most of Kevin's injuries had no visible scars.

Kevin was a scared, aggressive and temperamental child, so much that his DSS worker would drive him to therapy and psychiatrist appointments, at the desperate urging of the numerous foster families. Due to his behavioral problems, Kevin had been in and out of five

different homes by the age of nine. Kevin had been to psychiatric hospitals at his worst, and spent nine months in a residential treatment center due to increasingly violent and dangerous behavior. Kevin has tried to exit moving cars, threatened to jump out of 2nd floor bedroom windows, fought other children, struck adults, and run away from school. His artwork at a young age has generated concerned attention from teachers and therapists. Kevin came into the care of the Jones family two years ago after leaving a residential treatment center. To Kevin it appeared this was his last chance to live in a home before adults decided to place him in adolescent group care.

Mr. and Mrs. Jones were experienced parents, having raised their own two sons and a daughter who were out on their own and living their lives as young adults. They became foster parents as part of a spiritual calling – one that drew them to love and raise children who had no one. Kevin was not typical of the program. Most youth in foster care had some ongoing connection to their birth family. Kevin had no one. His mother had her rights terminated and no family came to find and care for him. He was alone, and his behavior and mood swings made it hard to get close to him. He fought, ran away, threatened, stole, pushed others away and argued *all the time*. He argued with any adult who directed him or attempted to care about him. In Kevin's life, adults were not to be trusted or respected. They were all temporary at some point any way. Kevin believed he had only himself to look out from him.

The first eight months were hard, very hard. Kevin did all of the things he knew how to do to make the Jones reject him. He fought their authority, ignored their rules, broke some of their

belongings and resisted their attempts to love him. Along the way, there were two trips to the emergency room, a week-long stay in the psych hospital, and countless therapy sessions: individual therapy, group therapy, family therapy. Medications were tried over many months with little benefit. Kevin was miserable and he was successful in making the Jones question their ability to care for him. Kevin was able to make the Jones parents shed their own tears while he shed none. It seemed Kevin was determined to eject himself from the home. It wasn't until the ninth month that Kevin showed any care about staying with the Jones. Kevin had a major crisis at his school and was informed that he may need to go back into a treatment program if would not stop his risky and dangerous behavior. Kevin and his foster parents began working very hard in family therapy. His foster parents continue to hold the line, but offered Kevin space and creative ways to express himself through art and music. Kevin started to come home from school with fewer complaints about his behavior. His grades improved to passing, and Kevin started to take some interest in some of his classes. The Jones family followed a routine of checking and helping Kevin with homework and taught him responsibility for his part of the home. Kevin's foster parents took him to church and encouraged him to join the choir. He resisted at first until he was ready to stand in the back of the group mouthing words but making no sound. That was until Kevin was ready, and then found his voice. He made a few friends and began to practice with them in the home. Kevin later joined the school music program and anxiously but successfully completed an audition. Kevin had his good days and bad days but no longer had his placement in jeopardy. The Jones began to trust him, and he began to trust them.

So what was it that made the difference? Was it all of the therapy? The right medication? The fear of placement back in a

treatment program? The music? Did Kevin have a sudden awakening or epiphany? No one can say that these things were not instrumental in Kevin making these changes. What can be said with confidence is that his foster parents, "his" parents as he calls them now, took him in with open hearts and stayed with him through the low as long as Kevin needed it. Kevin did not "straighten out" because the Jones won all of the arguments and he had submitted. They showed him love, patience, forgiveness, joy, laughter and at times, disappointment. But they expressed this disappointment in the context of we believe in you and love you enough to expect better of you. They also showed him tears and vulnerability. This at some level gave Kevin permission to experience these things himself.

There are thousands of Kevin's, and many like him out there in need of this experience. Being a treatment foster parent is no easy endeavor. It can however be an amazingly rewarding experience that can inspire a youngster for a lifetime. Please consider opening your hearts and your homes to help Maryland youth in need.

If you are interested
in **Inspiring
Lives** by
opening your home
and joining our
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