



LSA CELEBRATES FOSTER CARE MONTH

Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska

MADELINE'S STORY

Sixteen-year-old Madeline (all client names have been changed) is high school junior with big brown eyes and big dreams—her goal is to become a heart surgeon since she has had two open heart surgeries herself. Described as a “social butterfly,” she loves to talk and is very smart, doing well in most of her classes, especially Honors Science.

Bright and funny, Madeline entered the Nebraska foster care system at the age of seven, when she was taken from her home due to abuse and neglect. By 2010, when she was 11, Madeline was free for adoption. By that time, she had been a foster child in three different homes and was getting in trouble at school and acting out.

Several years passed, and Madeline had not yet found a permanent home. Her case was taken by Lisa Kelly, a Wendy's Wonderful Kids Adoptive Family Recruiter at Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska (LFS). LFS is the sole Nebraska partner of Wendy's Wonderful Kids, a program of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption that aggressively seeks permanency for hard-to-place youth in foster care. Madeline's luck began to change.

Dan and Brittany Emmett saw Madeline's photo on the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services website, and they inquired about her. Lisa, the LFS recruiter, assessed the couple to see if they would be a good match. Since the Emmetts were already a licensed foster family, a meeting was arranged. On May 7, 2014, Madeline met the family who could offer her the permanent home she had been longed for most of her life. At the time, Madeline was living in a residential treatment center, working through some of the trauma from her past. Dan and Brittany began attending Madeline's treatment team meetings, and then family therapy meetings. Madeline spent some time in the Emmett's home, and on Halloween, she moved in. The Emmetts wanted to adopt her.

It hasn't been easy. Madeline suffered through a lot of trauma, both in her biological mother's house, and in some foster placements. When she arrived at the Emmett's, her walls were up and she was scared to trust them because other family's had made adoption promises that were broken. She threw tantrums and ran away from home several times. Each time, Dan and Brittany went after her, and showed her unconditional love. They wanted her to know that they meant what they said— that they would love and care for her no matter what.

With the Emmett's support and continuing therapy, Madeline continues to improve. Her recruiter Lisa says, “No amount of treatment alone was going to make Madeline better. She has a long way to go because of the length of time she was in foster care, but her progress is significant and undeniable. This family's unconditional support and commitment was what she needed to begin the healing process.”

Today, Madeline is looking forward to her upcoming adoption. Her soon-to be-adoptive mother says, “Everyone wants to adopt the little ones. It's very important to consider older kids. Teens need a family, too.”

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Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska

LFS is a 122-year-old statewide, community-based human care organization. Its programs insure children caught in neglectful, abusive or violent situations find safety. They restore hope for those struggling with addictions and mental illness, and provide refugees welcome and acculturation on their path to citizenship.

LFS is the largest AmeriCorps program in Nebraska and impacts over 35,000 each year – and serves over 5,000 behavioral health clients statewide each year. LFS is the recipient of the 2013 Better Business Bureau Integrity Award.

For more information about LFS, visit www.lfsneb.org/

LFS of Nebraska is a member of the LSA Network, an LSA 20-500 Fund supporter and it's part of the Annie E. Casey-Provider Exchange LSA cohort.