



MAP Newsletter



Adoption through Foster Care on the Rise: 'Every child deserves a childhood'

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Lorie Hargis gave birth only twice, but at age 46, she's now been a mother many times over. Since taking in her first foster care child in 2013, she and her husband, Dwain, have adopted five children through the state of Kentucky's foster care



program and taken in at least 10 children for shorter-term foster stays.

“There’s always room in my house for one more, I like to say,” said Hargis from her Cecilia, Ky., farmhouse, her biological grandson and one of her foster children chattering in the background. “It’ll be

full when God says it’s full. Other than that, bring ’em on.”

Hargis said it doesn’t feel like she’s doing anything particularly wonderful by taking in children who need homes. “It feels very natural,” but to those kids who are adopted by the Hargises or by anyone else for that matter, she acknowledged, “it means everything.”

As of 2015, about 450,000 children were living in foster care in the United States, and more than 110,000 others were waiting to be placed in foster care, according to a report from the [Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System \(AFCARS\)](#). About 20,000 will age out by 21 (plus others in states where the age is 18) and leave the foster care system without being adopted, putting them at about a 50 percent greater risk of homelessness and a 25 percent greater risk of addiction when compared with children who grew up in stable homes. Men are also at a 40 percent greater risk of incarceration when they’ve aged out of the foster care system, according to the [Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption](#).

But a new national survey is offering hope for American kids waiting to be adopted: More people than ever are becoming parents in nonbiological ways, according to the new report conducted by the Thomas Foundation. The results showed that among Americans looking to adopt, nearly 80 percent of the group would consider accepting a child for foster care as a first step toward adoption. That percentage has steadily increased over the last five years.

Additionally, the survey found that many families looking to adopt often already have children at home. This “dispels the myth that infertility is the primary driver for considering foster care adoption,” said Rita Soronen, director and CEO of the Thomas Foundation.

Both domestic and international adoptions have decreased in the U.S. Teen pregnancy rates are down in the U.S., meaning that fewer newborns are being put up for adoption, and in 2017, overseas adoption dipped to its lowest rate in 35 years. There are different reasons for the international decline. It is expensive, as much as tens of thousands of dollars. But adopting through the U.S. foster care system is free of charge beyond some basic filing fees. Some countries have stopped allowing international adoptions out of concerns about corruption, or they have tightened their regulations on what constitutes child abandonment. Russia

halted adoptions by Americans in retaliation for U.S. sanctions — creating a controversy that is now caught up in the investigation into last year's election.

Foster care is a system in which a child has been placed, normally through the government or a social service agency, into a ward, group home, or private home of a state-appointed caregiver. Adoption is a process that legally and permanently removes the rights and responsibilities of the child's birth parents and transfers them to the adoptive parents. Fostering is seen as temporary and doesn't provide the same legal security as adoptive parents have. The child is able to keep a connection with the birth family and can potentially be reunited with them if improvements have been made.

Soronen said the organization was surprised by the increase in Americans who are “seriously considering” foster care adoption, among those thinking about adoption, which jumped from 15 percent in 2012 to 39 percent in 2017. “We have been working to increase awareness and share success stories of families who adopted from foster care over the past five years, but this was still an unexpected leap,” said Soronen.

Still, some misconceptions continue when it comes to foster care, Soronen reported: “Too often we hear that children in foster care are dangerous or have done something wrong. Nothing could be further from the truth.” The children are in foster care because their parents will not or are unable to take care of them in a healthy and proper way.

Most of the time, caseworkers seek to reunite the child with his or her biological parents. Children in foster care who are waiting for adoption are those who have been abused, abandoned, or neglected at such a level that the courts permanently severed the legal ties of the parent to the child. The Dave Thomas Foundation also found that barriers to adoption include concerns about a potential inability to handle behavioral issues. Other potential parents have voiced concerns that birth parents will eventually try to get their children back.

Lorie Hargis said she was completely new to the world of foster care only a few years ago, but with the help of a caseworker, she was able to get the hang of expectations and various behavioral issues that could come up with any child quite quickly.

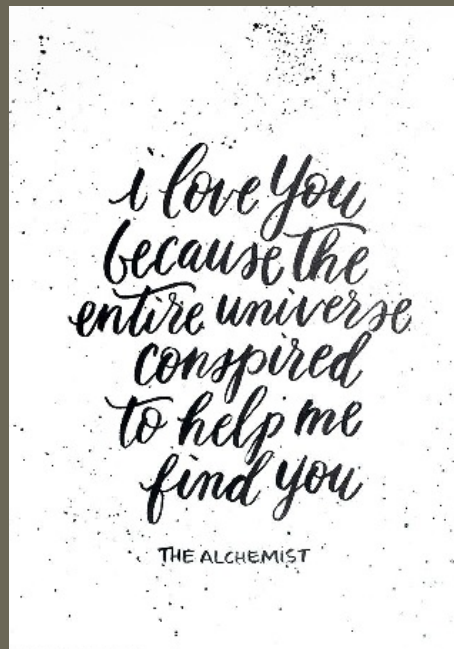
“Anyone who has a heart can feel a sort of helplessness for these kids because they certainly didn't ask for any of this,” said Hargis. But she said those feelings need to be compartmentalized: “You realize you're the adult, the parent, teaching morals and values. Maybe you're exposing them to positive communication or ideas they've never heard or seen. There is a harsh reality to foster care in terms of what these kids have been through, and it can take a little time and patience to undo what's been done to some of these children.”

A single caring adult who is consistently in a child's life puts him or her on track for a much higher rate of success than a child who has not experienced such stability, said Lauren Arnold, executive director of the Adoption Exchange. “There are so many kids in the U.S. who need that

leg up and that hope in their lives,” she said. That is why it’s important for the foster care system to prioritize permanency for children who are eligible for adoption in order to attain long-term health and success.

“Every kid is adoptable and every kid is ‘fixable,’” said Hargis. “Some kids may just require a little more of one thing from you and a little less of another.

“I’ll advocate for adoption through foster care till I’m blue in the face,” she continued. “Every child deserves a childhood, and every child deserves to have someone they can call Mom and Dad.”



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