

## Caring About Kids

I was recently involved in a conference call hosted by the Kansas Department for Children and Families (KS DCF) focusing on the needs of foster children, specifically those in need of adoption. The information they shared was designed to help public service staff promote Orphan Sunday as a means for educating the public about the significant number of children in Kansas in foster care and subsequently, the significant number of children who need adopted. Did you know that there are 995 Kansas Children who are available for adoption?

According to KS DCF, there are currently 6,676 children in foster care in Kansas. They are a part of our community, enrolled in our schools, live in our neighborhoods and play in our playgrounds. In truth, they touch our lives in ways we may never realize.

Orphan Sunday, November 3, 2013 offers us the opportunity to learn more about what we can do in our communities and neighborhoods to support these children and those who provide for their care. Because of professional and personal interests, I am drawn to help these children and encourage others to do the same.

The first and most direct way to support these children is to adopt a child out of the foster care system. Perhaps you have thought about this before, but have pushed it back in your mind for one reason or another. I have a professional friend, who at the age of 56, was able to retire from her career as a public educator. She and her husband decided that they had the time and resources to provide a foster home for a child or two. As they moved through the process of getting their home approved for

foster care, they realized that they were ready to make a stronger commitment and chose to adopt a 12 year old boy who had been in foster care for most of his life. That was over 3 years ago and they are doing well. Admittedly, it was a big change to their lifestyle that required a large investment of time, energy, and emotion, but they report that it was the best decision they have every made. It is possible that you know of someone in your neighborhood or workplace who has recently adopted a child out of foster care. One way you support this family would be to throw them a shower and invite neighborhood families to join in. This would be a great way for the children to meet some of the other children and adults in the neighborhood as well as equip the family with some of the basic needs they have for their expanding family. This kind of support is helpful to both the children and the adoptive parents. Offering to babysit on the parent's anniversary is another way you can support these families. The adoptive parents are facing a lot of change and will likely need additional resources for the children and for the family unit, as a whole.

Adoption is not the only way we can short support for children in the foster care program. You may be interested in becoming a foster parent or an emergency foster parent.

There are many other ways we can help these children through our communities, our work, and our resources. We can all help promote awareness and speak up for children in the foster care system. Often times they have a limited number of adults outside of their family that understand the challenges they face. Make it a point to connect with

foster care families and their foster children. Try to become more aware of what their needs are and help in areas you are comfortable with.

You could offer to help with a meal, pick up some groceries, or help with making sure the child has a coat for the winter. It isn't uncommon for foster children to have only a small amount of their own clothing and they typically don't have a duffel bag or suitcase to use when they have weekend visits with family. Perhaps you have a small bag that you could give to the child for this use. Surprise the child by lacing some new clothes inside the bag along with a couple of age-level books or a game.

Sometimes the simplest thing can help the most. A warm hello and quick wave is a welcome sight when they get home from school or are out riding a bike on the sidewalk. Sending a birthday card to the foster child is another simple gesture that can have an incredible positive impact on them.

Determine what you have to offer to children in foster care and especially those who need adopted. We all have some way we can reach out to help them. If you want to know more about foster care in Kansas or how to adopt children who are currently in foster care, you can find more information at [www.orphansunday@dcf.ks.gov](mailto:www.orphansunday@dcf.ks.gov).