

Spring/
Summer
2007

family

connections

Amara Family Story

Rex, Sam, and Kyle

Every Christmas Rex, Sam, and Kyle watch *The Polar Express*, and Kyle gets a bell. Not just any bell, but one of the bells that fell off Santa's sleigh. It's a special tradition that all three hold dear and plan to continue indefinitely. It may not seem much different than any other family's tradition, except that Kyle was 13 when he first came to live with Rex and Sam, and this is the first Christmas tradition he could hold as his own.

Rex and Sam were not new to adoption or Amara when they decided to adopt Kyle. In 1980, they adopted an eight-year-old boy with Asperger's Syndrome from Amara (then Medina Children's Services). While Amara was one of the first adoption agencies in the country to place children with gay and lesbian parents, at that time it was still illegal for gay and lesbian couples to adopt a child together. Sam alone became the legal parent so that they could complete their adoption of Rick.

Why 25 years later would they think to adopt another child, much less a teenager? After reading articles about gay foster children getting "stuck in the system" and facing even greater barriers to finding permanent, adoptive homes than straight teens, Sam and Rex felt a need to do something.

"We thought adopting a gay teenager would be all about the kid being gay. But it's much more about having a teenager in the house. His friends, his music. The gay issue is important and a big overlay, but before that we have to get him dressed, off to choir practice and school. It's more about the things any parent of a teenager would do," says Rex.

"Before Kyle, we had 15 years without a teenager. Now we're in our 50s. It's a lot of fun. It's very active at a time in our lives when we thought we'd be slowing down," says Sam.

Their first outing with Kyle was dinner at Cucina Cucina. Everyone was very nervous and Sam accidentally spilled an Italian soda all over Kyle's lap.

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Sam, Kyle, and Rex
in New York City.


Amara
Parenting & Adoption Services

Building strong
families for children
since 1921

(Amara Family Story *continued from page 1*)

The story makes them all laugh as they reminisce about that first meeting. What Sam and Rex really remember about that day is Kyle's spirit, his boyish goofiness, sense of humor, and kind personality. They had more outings and a month later, Kyle came home to live with them.

"We recognized right away that he is really resilient. He had been through many stressful foster care situations and he was determined to make something of his life. He has some wonderful skills that float him through school and friendship," says Rex.

Today, Kyle is 16 years old and loves to cook. His dads are both avid chefs and taught Kyle their love of good food and cooking. They eat dinner together as a family nearly every night.

Kyle's gentle, pillow soft voice belies his towering physical stature and is a good reminder that at 16, he is still a kid. He freely admits cleaning his room is far down on his list of priorities and, like most teens, he has a lot of attitude. "But it's not bad all the time," he jokes.

call for p h o t o s

As one of our social workers once said, your children's shining faces are the best testament to the work we do. If you would be willing to let us use photos of your children in newsletters, brochures, event material, or other agency uses, please let us know. Photos are never sold and would only be used to highlight the work we do. Contact Andrea at andrea@amaraparenting.org or (206) 260-1703.



When Kyle graduates from high school next year he plans to attend the Culinary Institute of America in New York and become a professional chef. This Christmas, in addition to watching *The Polar Express*, the three took a trip to New York to visit friends and introduce Kyle to the magic he has in store.

"If parents have the means and the heart to include children in their home, I think it is one of the biggest ways to grow as a person, spiritually and socially. It is the most important thing that parents can do. It is really a contribution to the world. There are so many children out there that need homes. What better thing could anyone do? That's why we did this twice," says Rex.

Adds Sam, "It's really not that scary. There are lots of teenagers out there that are abandoned. They need families and stability. If anyone feels they want to do something really important in life, look at teenagers. They are the most in need. They feel most rejected, the most discarded. They still need a family and they give you back so much."

Save the Date—Amara Annual Luncheon

Amara Annual Luncheon: *Fostering Our Future*
Tuesday, May 8, 2007 | 11:30 am–1:00 pm
Bell Harbor, Seattle

Honorary Chairs

John & Deanna Oppenheimer | Paul & Pamela Schell

Sponsors

Banner Bank	Seattle P-I
Frazier Healthcare and Technology Ventures	S.O.S. Foundation Sprague Israel Giles
Nintendo	

Amara's annual luncheon is in its seventh year and is attended by 250–300 people a year. This special event raises awareness and funds* to help give more foster children stable, loving homes through our Foster-Adopt and Foster Care Programs. Please join us for this special event, or for an even bigger impact, consider being a table captain and bring family and friends to learn about our programs and be inspired by the stories. For more information, please contact Andrea Fullerton at (206) 260-1703 or andrea@amaraparenting.org.

*All families are welcome, however Amara cannot accept donations from families whose adoptions are not yet finalized.

Foster Care Program Launched

While foster care was created to provide a temporary safety net for children until they could be returned to their parents or adopted into a permanent home, it was never intended to be a long-term solution. The longer a child remains in foster care, the greater chance they will have to experience multiple placements. Each successive move has the potential to rupture a trusting relationship, interrupt schooling and often delay critical medical and emotional care. Without permanence, many children from foster care are at-risk for long-term social and physical struggles.

Further compounding a foster child's road to permanence, a recent federal review of Washington State's child welfare system found that our state falls far below national standards in efforts to protect children from abuse and neglect and provide foster children with stable, permanent homes. The federal reviewers found that the state achieved stability and safety for children in only 44 percent of all cases, far short of the 90 percent goal. These statistics demonstrate the risks faced by children in our state who cannot live with their birth families, and confirm the need for private agen-

cies like Amara to become a greater part of the solution.

Amara recently began offering foster care services to help address the shortage and quality of licensed foster homes in Washington State. Amara's experienced social workers license and monitor foster homes and provide critical, ongoing support to foster families to ensure that foster children receive the best quality out-of-home care possible. By helping create nurturing, stable environments and minimizing disruptions, we can dramatically affect the lives of these vulnerable children.

Parent Support Group

We recently launched the monthly Amara Parent Support Group Meetings for all current Amara waiting families and families with children already placed in their homes. Meetings are held on the third Thursday of the month and will feature a guest speaker and offer participants the opportunity to meet other families and to share experiences. Our first meetings have been very well attended; participants were actively involved and expressed excitement about this level of support.

Meetings are held the Third Thursday of Every Month 6:30–8:30 p.m.

Amara—3300 East Union Street, Seattle
Food, beverages and childcare are provided.
Please call (206) 260-1700 to RSVP.

successes i n 2 0 0 6

21* Foster children placed with forever families

Children placed in permanent, adoptive homes **40***

31 Adoptions finalized

42* Pregnant women in crisis counseled

New families trained and approved for adoption **44***

*Increase from 2005

Amara Staff

Heidi Adams, Administrative Specialist
Adrienne Farrow, Finance Manager
Andrea Fullerton, Development Manager
Chris Gaston, Program Assistant
George Glisson-Munier, Child Placement Specialist
Carla Granat, Mediator
Billy Hancock, Recruitment Specialist
Kaki Kesterson, Pregnancy and Parenting Counselor
Megan Lanese, Pregnancy and Parenting Counselor

Gretchen Langmaid, Foster Care and Adoption Specialist
Mary Lingenfelter, Foster Care and Adoption Specialist
Carol Mikkelsen, Director of Programs
Anne-Marie Patrick, Adoption Specialist
John Morse, Executive Director
Elena Selkie, Clinical Lead and Adoption Specialist
Lon-Marie Walton, Family Development Specialist
Cynthia Williams, Foster Care and Adoption Specialist
Newsletter layout courtesy of Ann Hettinger.



become a foster parent

Amara is currently recruiting foster parents for our new Foster Care program. Understanding that the role of foster parent is exciting but challenging, our primary goal is to create a community of support for our foster families. To allow us to maintain this high level of support, we are seeking homes within the City of Seattle. If you are outside of the city limits but still very interested in becoming a foster family, we will be happy to discuss the possibility based on your distance from Amara and our current staff capacity. If we feel we are unable to provide adequate services, we will be happy to refer you to another agency. Please consider joining us as we develop this new and much needed program. For more information, please contact Mary Lingenfelter at (206) 260-1741.



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