

Stowell Family Transforms the Lives of Children Through Adoption

After facing the hurdles, trials, and emotional toll of infertility, Brian and Michelle Stowell made a decision that would not only transform their lives, but also bring about a profound change in the lives of two young children.

“We tried to have kids, but we had a couple of ectopic pregnancies,” began Brian. “We did in-vitro several times and it didn’t work. I’m pro-my wife’s body, so I was ok with whatever decision at that point.”

After witnessing firsthand the impact of fostering in their respective roles as a Duquesne City School District administrator (Brian) and a middle school math and coding teacher (Michelle), the couple started contemplating the possibility of becoming foster parents themselves.

The pair also had a friend who had opened her home to foster children, but tragically, one of the children she cared for ended up suffering horrific abuse upon being reunited with their biological family.

“We saw the ugly of it and it made us a little afraid, so we decided to look into adoption. We asked our friend all sorts of questions about what she went through, said Brian. “We thought maybe there are kids out there who could help us complete our family. We decided to go the foster-to-adoption route.”

“We said if we bring a kid into our home, they’re never leaving if it’s within our control,” he continued. “The good, the bad, the ugly— whatever the kid brought, we’d deal with it. That’s how we are.”

After the Stowells, of Irwin, began the process to become foster parents, Brian spotted a familiar name while scrolling the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network’s (SWAN) web site: Adelphoi.

“When I got out of the military, one of my first jobs was with Adelphoi,” he noted. “I worked in the maximum security unit in Latrobe. I knew they also did adoptions, so we decided we’d go with someone who was familiar to us.”

Shortly thereafter, Michelle and Brian were introduced to a young boy from Washington County named Bentley, who they later renamed Asher.

“As soon as we met him, we knew this was what we were meant to do,” said Brian.

Approximately one year later in July of 2023, Asher, now 11, was officially adopted by the Stowells.

“It has been so rewarding to see Asher’s confidence boost,” exclaimed Michelle. “The changes in him since he came to us, how he interacts with our family, it’s like we’ve had him since birth. He fits in so well.”

During Asher’s adoption court proceedings, their caseworker mentioned a little girl in need of a foster home. Brian and Michelle wasted no time and quickly called to express their desire to provide her with a safe and loving home.

“Asher was excited,” said Brian. “He said he wanted a sibling.”

Aniah, who is eight years old and also from Washington County, was embraced as a member of the Stowell family. She now anxiously awaits her upcoming adoption day.

“We have two really great kids,” praised Brian. “They’ve really blended in. My nieces and nephews are in Florida and they will all FaceTime. They have FaceTime meetings in the closet,” he laughed. “The secret lives of 8 and 11-year-olds.”

“My dad and Asher have such a huge bond,” he added. “He calls to talk to him and doesn’t even ask to talk to me.”

The Stowells noted that witnessing the excitement for so many “firsts” for the children has been particularly heartwarming, such as Aniah’s first sleepover and Asher’s first flight on an airplane.

“There are so many little moments and successes that are just so big for them,” said Brian.

“We took them to Disney World this past summer and they never thought that was something that would be ever possible for them.”

In addition to the victories, Brian and Michelle have also faced their fair share of challenges along their journey.

“Asher’s mom is still in the picture,” Michelle stated. “She had strong mental health issues and it was difficult trying to help Asher work through all that. He knew why he wasn’t with his mom. He knew she wasn’t compliant with the court in order to get him back, but he wasn’t really aware of the whole situation. He had a lot of resentment toward his mom, but he told me that he cried when the cops took her.”

“We have an agreement where he talks to her and he can see her, but he had some issues dealing with the trauma,” she said.

“Considering where we work, we know how to communicate with trauma and how to help process it. He has graduated from trauma therapy. He is so good with coping and he understands why things happen. He is so intelligent and you can talk to him. He is like a full-grown adult in an 11-year-old’s body.”

Michelle recalled their initial meeting with Asher, who brought along a notebook that contained a list of questions to ask them, such as whether he would have his own bedroom and if he would have a door on his bedroom.

“He slept on a couch at the one apartment he lived in, then he lived in a tiny trailer with his grandmother,” she explained. “Something as little as a door was a big deal to him.

“To this day, he can still tell you what all of those questions were,” Michelle laughed.

The Stowells offered invaluable advice to aspiring foster parents, including the importance of maintaining genuine and transparent communication with each other and with the children in their care.

“Our communication is great and our kids know this,” Brian said. “They know dad is going to give them the same answer as mom.”

“The school is such a good resource,” he advised. “Use your school. If you have a kid acting out, the school has so many resources to help inside your house and at school. Be open and honest with the school. Home and school need to work together to be successful socially and emotionally.”

“There is no bad kid out there,” Brian declared. “Just bad situations and bad environments. Everyone ends up being what their environment was.”

“They will test you, but regardless of how tough they are, every kid out there just wants to know if you are still going to love them. They want to know that you are still going to be there for them and never leave them.



