

## Short-Term, Long-Term, Or Even Permanent Placement:

### THIS FOSTER PARENT DUO WANTS WHAT'S BEST FOR THE CHILDREN

**The common perception of foster parents is selflessness: the willingness to open one's home to a child.**

**The lesser-known form of foster parent selflessness is the willingness to open one's home to a child, understanding that the child may find a permanent placement elsewhere, and that the foster parent's job is to help the young person figure out his or her best options.**

**LYZ AND HER HUSBAND, SHAWN,** embrace the multi-faceted role of protector, navigator, and facilitator for the two teenagers currently in their care and the four other children they helped before them.

The first role is answering the bell, providing food, shelter, love, and understanding.

The second role of navigation requires taking on child welfare agencies, the courts, the medical system, and anything else required for a child's well-being. Sometimes, procuring needed services requires determination and advocacy. An overwhelmed case worker once communicated poorly; Lyz learned not to take anything personally and keep the focus on the child's needs.

The facilitator role comes as the child faces permanent placement options. Is a family member equipped to take custody, and if the child wants to seek placement with a relative,

does the relative offer a safe environment in which the child will thrive? If not, is the foster parent able to help the family member achieve the steps needed to create such an environment?

Lyz and Shawn currently foster two teenage boys in their home, Ryan\*, age 15, and David\*, age 14.

Ryan has 19 siblings, and an older sister he speaks to who might someday be a candidate to adopt him. He's in regular touch with various family members.

"We think it's important for him to stay in communication with his family," Lyz said. "These kids have had a whole lifetime with their family before us. We want to make sure they continue with that connection."

Ryan had been in a group home with a local agency during the height of Covid-19. The Scotts met him over Zoom and then outside

the facility to consider whether he and they would be a good fit for each other, a bit like speed dating, Lyz joked.

"I think the minute I met him, I was like, oh, he's a good kid," Lyz said. "I know that X,Y,Z occurred but I see a lot of love in his heart, even the way he talked about his siblings. So we took the plunge."

With the combination of a supportive school and a loving, structured home environment, Ryan made the honor roll for the first time this quarter.

At home, iPhones are turned off at 10 p.m. when the boys go to bed. Family dinners with no phones occur almost every night. The ability to have a good night's sleep makes a difference for the boys. Something as seemingly simple as that is not readily available to youth in foster care, especially to those in congregate care facilities.

*celebrates*  
**FOSTER FAMILIES**

The family skateboards and plays music and board games together. The boys' personalities are coming through.

Ryan is extremely social and loves to be with his friends, in person or on FaceTime. He is also "one of the smartest people I've ever met," Lyz said. "He's very much that guy that sits back and lets everything happen but observes everything. Playing board games, he'll play the, 'oh, I don't get it' card. Then he wipes us all clean."

David is also intelligent and enjoys video games and computer coding. He even does "quadratic equations for fun," Lyz said.

The boys have set chores as part of the structure they crave. When Lyz asked Ryan to vacuum the stairs, he took on additional rooms on his own. He told Lyz, "You already have so much to do. If I can take one thing off your plate, I'm happy to do it."

Recently he has also emerged as the protector of David, who has occasional emotional outbursts, for which he receives professional treatment.

The boys share a room, even though there's space for them to separate. "They take care of each other, and they call each other 'brother,'" Lyz said.

David might be interested in having the Scotts adopt him, although it's a big decision for a 14-year-old, and there's no rush. The Scotts will help David with the path that's right for him when it's time.

Even with two teen-age boys, the Scotts are willing to welcome another child if the fit makes sense.

Lyz and Shawn both had hard childhoods, which motivated their decision to become foster parents. They married in 2016, bought their house in 2017, and delved into foster care in 2018.

"The only reason I'm not dead or crazy is because strangers and family members cared for me," Lyz said. "I decided that once I got older and was capable, I would open my heart and my house to fostering. Sometimes that one person who cares makes a huge difference."

Lyz traveled the world as an events manager. She was furloughed during the pandemic, which turned out for the best. She spent most of the summer with the kids. She now helps run a homeless youth shelter in the same program that once helped Ryan.

A big part of Lyz's role is managing the food, teaching the kids how to cook a good meal, and eating as a temporary family. "I like to think that somewhere down the road, maybe when they're 30, they'll be like, 'oh that person showed me how to make chicken cutlet parm,'" Lyz said. "And it's a good memory they can take from being in a tough situation."

The Scotts know that any child in their care might leave, and it's their job to do what's best for the child above all. A six-year-old boy who was with them for a short time

last year was reunited with his biological mother. The reunification process involved some tense moments, including when the child thought he'd be going home in just a few weeks, when the schedule was at the mercy of courts slowed by the pandemic.

The birth mother teared up at seeing her son care for Lyz, who was understanding. "If I were her, it probably would break my heart to see my biological child care about another adult, a stranger," Lyz said. "I understand how hard that part of it is."

Shawn said he learned to navigate the roller coaster of emotions that come with being a foster parent. Part of that was realizing that everyone has baggage, from kids to adults. What really matters is opening your home and making the children feel welcome, he said.

Remember that the kids have moved around a lot, and your placement might be the longest they've lived somewhere in a long time or ever. Provide the structure that they crave, even as they fight it, because it means being cared for and frees them to enjoy being kids, Shawn said.

"There are a lot of kids out there who need support," he said. "If you have the ability to do it and you have the extra means, then share it. And even if you don't think you have that, you probably have more than you think you do."

*\* Names changed to protect the children.*

*Jill Gerber, a free-lance writer, regularly covers the families and children who work hard for success in foster care.*

*CHAMPS is grateful to Ms. Gerber and the Scott family for contributing this story.*