



A foster child gets his wish

Saul Qersdyn drives his 15-year-old adopted son, Rashad, to school and shares a laugh with him as they listen to their favorite rock station. He drops him off, tells him he loves him and to have a good day, and makes his way to work. While driving, he can't help but smile as he remembers the quiet, shy boy he first met five years ago, who has grown into a confident young man.

Mr. Qersdyn is no stranger to adoption. Both his father and best friend of 25 years were adopted. He was moved by the generosity of spirit exhibited by their parents, and the tremendously positive influence they had on his father and friend. Eventually, he realized he wanted to do the same for a child.

To find out more about this potentially life-changing endeavor, he and his wife, Elisabeth, attended an information session at Fairleigh Dickinson University's Teaneck campus, where members of different agencies spoke about various aspects of adoption. He overheard something that caught his attention. A staff member from Children's Aid and Family Services was talking to a group of prospective adoptive parents about older child adoption. Mr. Qersdyn learned that if he and his wife were interested in adopting, they would have a chance to actually be in the same environment as the children, and the agency would provide training. They could interact directly with the children by performing a volunteer internship at one of the agency's group homes for children.

"I was amazed that the agency offered courses on how to deal with adopting a child; I never knew anything like that existed," says Mr. Qersdyn.

After giving the staff member information and filling out paperwork, the Qersdyns began training with other potential adoptive families. They visited the agency's group home for young boys in Paramus twice a week, and were introduced to the children as volunteer staff members. They enthusiastically embraced the internship, helping to cook for the kids, play with them, and get them ready for bed.

See Rashad on page 2

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Fall is fabulous at The Depot



Just in time for fall shopping, birthdays, and special occasions, a number of exquisite handmade items are arriving at The Depot, an all-volunteer gift and craft shop. Unique home goods, including elegant serving sets, vases, wine glasses, teapots, photo frames, holiday ornaments and decorations, baby clothing and toys, as well as Vera Bradley handbags, can be found at The Depot.

Started more than 42 years ago, The Depot is a women's exchange that helps skilled women and senior citizens who need to generate income through their arts and crafts. All proceeds are donated to Children's Aid and Family Services.

The Depot's fall hours are Monday - Saturday, 9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., and Thursday, 9:30 a.m. - 7:30 p.m. Holiday hours begin November 26, and are Monday - Thursday, 9:30 a.m. - 7:30 p.m., Friday 9:30 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. and Saturday, 9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Holiday merchandise will be available in mid-October. The Depot is located at 22 Prospect Street in Midland Park. For more information, call 201.444.6120, or visit <http://thedepot.cafsnj.org>.

"We weren't just observers, we were staff; we got to know who these kids were," says Mr. Qersdyn. "When we saw the kids, and spent time with them in the house, we could see they were just kids, no matter what issues they had. They weren't statistics; they were human beings who wanted to love and wanted to be loved."

When the Qersdys first saw Rashad in the children's group home, he was very quiet. He always wanted to be alone, sitting in the corner and not talking. A seemingly small occurrence changed that one day. Mr. Qersdyn first connected with Rashad when he was working on a computer problem in the group home. When he finally fixed it, he felt a hand on his shoulder, and heard Rashad shout with excitement, "You fixed it!" Mr. Qersdyn was touched by the boy's enthusiasm and amazement over this.

Not long after that, when the Qersdys were getting ready to leave, Rashad came up to them and asked, "Do you have to go?" They realized there was something special about him, and knew they were ready to let this child into their home and life.

Children's Aid and Family Services' group homes have a ritual called "the telling and the asking." (To read more about this special ritual, see "A Good Goodbye" on page 3.) The Qersdys had their asking ritual with Rashad in December 2002. It was very emotional for them; they were in tears when they asked Rashad, "Do you want to be part of our family?" He said, "Yes." He began to visit their house, first with a staff supervisor for a few hours at a time, then half a day, then a whole day and night unsupervised. Rashad lived with the Qersdys for a year from December 2002 to December 2003, before his adoption was finalized in March 2004.

Rashad was separated from his birth father at age 8, and was in three foster homes before he joined Children's Aid and Family Services. When he first came to the Qersdyn home, Rashad had trouble adjusting, and was scared of being in a new place. In the past people told him they loved him, only to abandon him and walk out of his life. He was worried the same thing would happen again this time, and had trouble sleeping. Mr. Qersdyn assured Rashad he would always be there for him. To make him feel safe, he slept in the living room outside Rashad's room for a week until he felt comfortable.

Rashad also had trouble with social interactions. He would never make eye contact with people in conversation, and would say his thoughts out loud. He had problems at school, as well. If one or two kids didn't like him, he assumed everyone hated him, and had a "me against the world" mentality. He didn't have many friends, and didn't communicate well.

To help him learn how to interact with people, without embarrassing him, the Qersdys created code words. For instance, when Rashad was talking to others they would use codes such as "EC" for eye contact, "E" for etiquette, and "HS" for handshake. As a result, he is now a much happier, expressive teen, and even has his first best friend.



Rashad and Saul Qersdyn in New York City.

“ I would recommend adopting older children because they have such personality, and a rich history. They have so much to give; age should never be a factor in determining love for a child. It’s not really about what I’ve gained from becoming an adoptive father, but what I would have lost if I didn’t become one. ”

~ Saul Qersdyn

A good goodbye

The “telling and the asking” is a special ritual that is done in Children's Aid and Family Services' PATH group homes for young children. After the potential adoptive family completes its volunteer internship at the group home, and is approved to adopt the child they have indentified, the telling and asking occurs. Below is Rashad's experience.

A staff member picked him up from school early, and brought him back to the group home, where his case manager, group home supervisor, and therapist were waiting for him. They told him there was a family who wished to adopt him. They asked Rashad how he felt about this, if he was happy or excited, and if the Qersdyns were the family he expected. Rashad was given a chance to express his thoughts and feelings about this, and asked questions, such as where he would live, or if he would have siblings. After this meeting, the staff member took Rashad out for ice cream to celebrate.

The “telling” is always done on a Tuesday, when the children in the group home have group therapy. While Rashad was out with the staff member, the rest of the children were informed about his pending adoption. They had an opportunity to express their feelings about the situation – some children felt angry or sad that Rashad was leaving, or were jealous that a family hadn't chosen to adopt them. After the children came to terms with Rashad's adoption, they were asked to tell Rashad something positive, such as, “I'm sad you're leaving, but I'm happy for you.”

The “asking” part of the ritual took place the next day at the agency's 200 Robin Road location. The Qersdyns, Rashad, and the case manager met. The Qersdyns formally asked Rashad, “Will you be part of our family?” Rashad said “Yes.” He brought a list of questions to ask them, such as where do they live, if they had pets or children, what his bedroom would look like, and what school he would attend. The Qersdyns then gave him a “storybook” containing pictures of their family.

After this meeting, Rashad, the Qersdyns, and a staff member went out to dinner. Following dinner, Rashad had his first visit to the family's home with his case manager, which lasted for about three hours. The visits got longer and longer, until, eventually, Rashad spent the night, and finally, moved in to the Qersdyn's home.

“The telling and asking ritual is important for these children, because in most cases, they have been moved from place to place without having time to think or prepare, or even gather their personal belongings,” says Melissa Goring, adoption specialist for Children's Aid and Family Services. “It's beneficial to them because it shows them there is such a thing as a ‘good goodbye.’”

To learn more about becoming a foster or adoptive parent, call 201.226.0300.

Baby Basics' Englewood distribution center moves

The Englewood distribution center of Children's Aid and Family Services' Baby Basics program has moved to the Center for Food Action, at 192 West Demarest Avenue, Englewood. This new site will enable the program to serve more needy families in the Southeast Bergen area.

Baby Basics provides nutritional formula and diapers to low-income families in Bergen County with children 2 and under.

"This partnership of the Baby Basics program of Children's Aid and Family Services and the Center for Food Action is an excellent example of two agencies working together to provide the best help possible to those we serve," says Bob Jones, president & CEO, Children's Aid and Family Services. "Together, we can help significantly more vulnerable members of the community."

Donations for Baby Basics can be dropped off during the Center for Food Action's regular hours, Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and should be clearly labeled for Baby Basics.



Staff and volunteers of both agencies at the Center for Food Action.

Scouts hold diaper, formula drives



Members of Girl Scout Troop 730 with the product collected during their drive.

The Girl Scouts have been hard at work recently, conducting drives to benefit Baby Basics. Girls from Troop 188 in Hillsdale, NJ, purchased items for the program, including diapers, formula, and wipes. Another Troop, 730 from Harrington Park, ran successful events including bake and garage sales, and then used the proceeds to buy needed items for Baby Basics.

"These are just two examples of how to support this important program," says Liz Mason, executive vice president. "There are many different ways you can help that will fit into your budget, available time, and

interests. One unique way is to host a birthday party, but instead of asking for traditional gifts, you can tell your guests to bring packages of diapers, wipes, formula, and other baby supplies. If you own a business, you can set up a display in your store for customers to donate items. Or you can organize a drive through your house of worship, employer, child's school, or your social group. Further, you can commit to support a baby for a week for \$71, a month for \$284, or any length of time up to a full year for \$3,408."

Simple guidelines on how to conduct a product drive are available by visiting www.cafsnj.org. For more information, please call Shakeemah Smith at 201.445.7015, ext. 236, email: ssmith@cafsnj.org.



Members of Girl Scout Troop 188 with their donation to the Baby Basics program.

An accidental mentor

John M.* knew he wanted to do something meaningful with his free time. He just didn't know what. Surfing the internet one day, he stumbled upon Children's Aid and Family Services' website, www.cafsnj.org. He read about the agency's Mentoring Program, where adolescents in the agency's care are matched with mentors according to their talents and interests, and became intrigued.

Mr. M. contacted Kelly Guerrieri, youth support services coordinator, and began a 4-week training session. During this time, Mr. M. was told what to expect as a mentor, and was given examples of situations he might encounter. He learned that it might take awhile for a child to open up, because most of the children had been abandoned or neglected by the people who were supposed to care for them. "Knowing that was helpful to me, and I went into mentoring with an open mind," he says.

He began mentoring Mike*, a 15-year-old boy who lives at Children's Haven, the agency's group home for adolescents in Park Ridge. When Mr. M. first met Mike, the teen was nervous and didn't say much. With several failed foster placements, and a long-time separation from his mother and brother, there were not many people in his life he could count on.

Over time, Mike began to feel more comfortable around him. Mr. M. started calling him once or twice a week, just to ask about what was happening in Mike's life. They now have regular get togethers. They go out to breakfast every other Sunday. They've also gone to Dave & Busters to eat dinner and play video games, attended a basketball game, and spent time shooting pool.

"I remember how important it was for me to have meals with my family. I'm hoping these will be memorable experiences for Mike, too," says Mr. M.

**Name changed to protect privacy.*



John M. is mentoring a 15-year-old boy who lives at Children's Haven.

Slowly, Mike started opening up to Mr. M., and trusting him. The two now talk about music, videos, current events, and Mr. M.'s job as an event marketer with Foot Locker.

Mr. M. hopes that by meeting with Mike regularly and staying in touch, he'll help the teen to develop consistency and stability in his life. Mr. M. makes sure to keep their regular routine of phone calls and meals together, and looks forward to seeing Mike.

"I believe it's important that Mike knows I am taking the mentor program seriously," says Mr. M. "I think of myself as a friend to Mike, someone who will listen to him. I believe teenagers need someone to listen to their opinions – they are the future."

Children's Aid and Family Services Mentor Program offers children in the agency's care the opportunity to receive adult guidance from a different perspective other than a teacher or staff member. The mentor/mentee relationship helps to create stability in a child's life. If you are interested in becoming a mentor, please contact Kelly Guerrieri at 201.445.7015, ext 218.

Goldman Sachs donates 4-seat stroller



Thanks to a generous donation from Goldman Sachs, the staff and children at Turrell Child Care & Early Learning Center now have a new 4-seat stroller!

Fun events at the Turrell Center



The children at the Turrell Child Care & Early Learning Center in Paramus enjoyed a fun summer that featured many special events, including the two pictured here. A graduation ceremony was held for the Kindergarten class of 2007, and attended by their proud families and friends. Each graduate received an award, such as “most polite,” “best artist” and “best dancer.” The class sang “A dream is a wish your heart makes,” from Disney’s *Cinderella*. Each boy and girl shared their own wishes with the audience, which included being a princess, having a baby brother, and growing up to be a veterinarian.

The second annual Trike-a-thon was held at the Turrell Center, too. Sporting brightly colored helmets, children from each class excitedly raced around the parking lot, which was cleared of cars. Orange cones created the bike course. Enthusiastic parents, friends and classmates cheered the future Lance Armstrongs as they happily pedaled lap after lap. For more information on the Turrell Center, call 201.261.5970.

New fund honors long-time volunteer Barbara Abney Bolger



Barbara Abney Bolger

A new named endowment fund has been established in honor of Barbara Abney Bolger, in recognition of her dedication to Children's Aid and Family Services' group homes for more than three decades.

The "Barbara Abney Bolger Fund" will provide for the maintenance, renovation and other capital needs of the Woodlea and PATH I group foster homes. Woodlea, located in Ridgewood, is one of the agency's group homes for teenage girls. PATH I, located in Paramus, is a group foster home for boys.

In 1972, Ms. Bolger had been a member of the Junior League for four years when the organization decided to team up with Children's Aid and Adoption Society – which later became Children's Aid and Family Services – to establish a foster home for teenage girls in a suburban community. At that time, children who were removed from their families were automatically sent to juvenile detention facilities, despite being the innocent victims of the situation. A homemaker with three young children of her own, Ms. Bolger was outraged by this and advocated that children who were removed from difficult family situations should be given the opportunity – like other children – to live in a home in a community where they could go to school and church and participate in activities.

Ms. Bolger led the Junior League's taskforce on the group home project. "Many of us on the taskforce were living in Ridgewood, so we chose to establish Woodlea here," she recalls. "That way we could be advocates for the agency and show that we wanted this in our backyard."

For five months after buying a house on Prospect Street, Junior League members worked together to renovate it. They stripped wallpaper and flooring, spackled and painted, and refurbished the house with wallpaper, rugs, draperies, and floor coverings that were donated or bought with deep discounts. They furnished the house and dressed the beds with new and almost new items that made the place a home. The house was named "Woodlea," by

combining the "wood" in Ridgewood with "lea" for the Junior League.

Ms. Bolger has been one of Children's Aid and Family Services' most dedicated volunteers, serving as a trustee of the agency's forebear, Children's Aid and Adoption Society, and now of Children's Aid and Family Services. She also chairs, as she has done for many years, the Woodlea/PATH I Advisory Council, and plays an active role in organizing parties and recreational trips for both houses, bringing flowers to the girls that make honor roll, presenting graduation gifts, and engaging in other activities that enhance the quality of life of the girls and boys in these homes.

Under Barbara Bolger's leadership, the Woodlea/PATH I Advisory Council has continued to foster that same sense of caring, and to play an active role in maintaining an inviting atmosphere in the homes. In the past two years, the council has raised funds to re-finish hardwood floors, replace carpeting, install wallpaper, and purchase new living room and dining room furniture. The Woodlea kitchen and laundry rooms are currently being given complete makeovers, with new cabinets, countertops, flooring, tile and wallpaper.

Anyone who would like to make a contribution of cash, stock or securities to the Barbara Abney Bolger fund may do so by:

- *Calling Bob Jones or Liz Mason at 201.261.2800;*
- *Visiting the agency's website, www.cafsnj.org. Click on "How to Help" and select "Donate Online." Please write "Barbara Abney Bolger Fund" in the designation line;*
- *Mail to: The Development Dept., Children's Aid and Family Services, 200 Robin Road, Paramus, NJ 07652. Please make checks payable to "Children's Aid and Family Services," and write "Barbara Abney Bolger Fund" in the subject line.*

Mark your calendar: A wine & food tasting evening

A baseball mitt signed by a legendary hall-of-famer, a behind-the-scenes tour of a major television network, a personal photo session with a professional photographer, tickets to a New York Jets football game, a tour of the historic United States Congress – these and many more exciting and exclusive opportunities and experiences are all available for bid at the silent auction at Children's Aid and Family Services' "Wine & Food Tasting Evening" on Saturday, October 20, 2007, at St. Leon's Church, on Saddle River Road, in Fair Lawn.

In addition to the fantastic auction items, this evening will include selections of wines from around the world – provided by Carlo Russo's Wine & Spirit World in Ho-Ho-Kus – food furnished



by some of the area's finest restaurants, fun cooking demos, exciting raffles and live music. Jean Ann Lynch, the founder of Baby Basics, will be honored, as will Linda Yolman, one of the agency's Boarder Baby foster moms.

The proceeds from this special event will focus on supporting programs for infants and young children in the agency's care. It will particularly benefit Baby Basics, an agency program that provides vitally needed formula and diapers to babies of low-income parents. The program serves between 60 and 100 Bergen County families per month on average.

Tickets for the event are \$75. If you would like further information about the event, to become a sponsor, or to purchase tickets, please call Lyn Rumage at 201.261.2800.

The mission of Children's Aid and Family Services is to preserve, protect and, when needed, provide families. Motivated by compassion for vulnerable children, young adults, frail elderly and their families, we provide high-quality and innovative services that meet their social, educational and emotional needs. Since 1899, the agency has been recognized as a leader in adoption and specialty therapeutic services for children who have been severely traumatized and abused. For more information, please visit www.cafsnj.org.



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