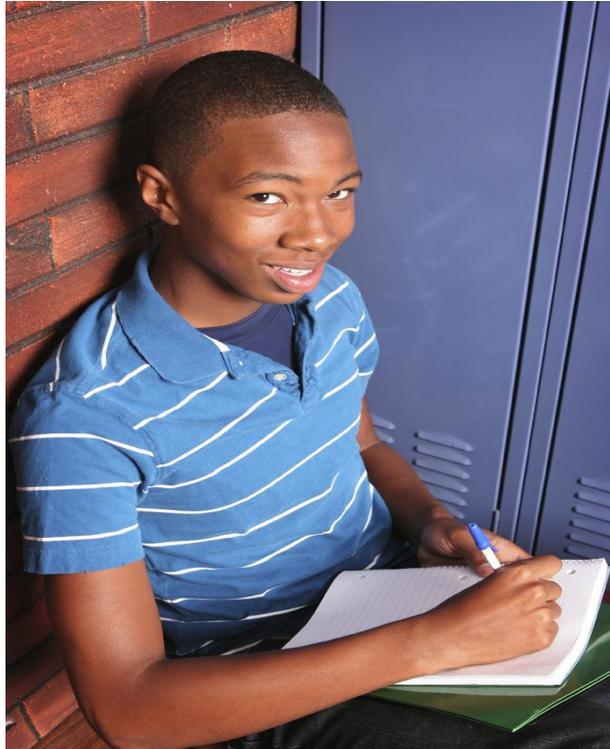


The American Orphan

By Arleta James, PCC

He may wear the same popular brand names as your children. She may be a cheerleader like your daughter. He may like video games and hanging out at the mall or playing any type of ball. She may be into the latest hairstyles and texting her friends. You really can't always tell an American "Waiting Child"—orphan— from an adopted, birth or step child.



Yet in America, 115,000 children and teens “wait” for an adoptive home. These kids blend into the communities in which they live. While in foster care they typically receive good care and many opportunities—clothing, food, homes, education, etc. So, they don't look like what we think of as “orphans.” But, if not adopted, these American orphans' future can be quite bleak. For example, foster children, especially those who age out of the child welfare system with no permanent family have:

- Poor educational outcomes; more than 1/3 have not completed high school,
- Considerable more mental health issues than others in the same age group,
- Much more likely to have been pregnant and to carry the pregnancy to term.

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Within 18 months of discharge from foster care:

- More than 1/3 have been physically or sexually victimized, incarcerated or are homeless,
- One in five has lived in four or more places,
- Only 61% were employed, earning a median wage of \$4.60 per hour.

“Overall the outcomes for American youth who age out of foster care without a family are extremely troubling. As a group, they struggle to establish themselves as productive adults without the emotional and financial support of families—and society ultimately bears the cost of serving many of them in adult services systems. (North American Council on Adoptable Children, 2008.)”

Frequently, these American orphans are older when available for adoption—the average age is 8.2 years. Many—38%—are adolescents. This age factor can actually be a positive in adoption. An abundance of background information is available: birth family history, psychological evaluations, therapist records, school evaluations and Individual Education Plans, etc. There are plenty of adults familiar with the child to add even more information such as teachers, coaches, church members, foster families, therapists and so on. A family adopting an older child can be quite prepared for any challenges the child will present upon arrival in their family.

American children (with rare exceptions) are also available for [adoption subsidy](#). This is a monthly payment and a health insurance card provided until the child is age 18 (21 in some instances.) This funding is provided to help offset the services needed to help the adoptee achieve physical, cognitive and mental health.

Older children offer many opportunities to become immediately involved in all types of activities—education, sports, arts and crafts, baking and cooking together, mowing the lawn, planting the garden, visiting the museum. You can expose them to your passions and join in their interests immediately—attachment is possible with an older child when parents and children engage in each other’s interests!

In conclusion, as you pursue your path to adoption don’t overlook our American orphans! They need families too!

Visit [AdoptUsKids](#) today to become acquainted with our American “waiting” children. I think you’ll be glad you did!