

Progress: Look Back Rather Than Ahead

By Arleta James, PCC

“Hope is the thing with feathers, that perches in the soul, and sings the tune without words, and never stops at all.” by Emily Dickinson

It is always nice to get good news. It is also wonderful in the world of traumatized adoptees to know that there can be successful outcomes. Hope is essential when dealing with children with mental health issues. The day to day struggles can seem overwhelming! On these days, keep the following in mind about young adult adoptees:



*The information was obtained by comparing foster children who “age out” of the child welfare system with children who are adopted. **

Therefore, in comparison with their foster care counterparts, adoptees are:

- More likely to complete high school or the equivalent
- More likely to attend and complete college
- Less likely to become teen parents

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- Less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol
- Less likely to have mental health problems
- Less likely to be arrested and incarcerated
- More likely to be employed
- More likely to have adequate incomes
- More likely to have health insurance

Overall, most families do describe their [adoption as successful](#) or positive in the long-run. Many of these families do so as they have the capacity—daily, weekly, monthly or annually—to look back rather than always looking forward. They can acknowledge the progress instead of chronically worrying about what the future will hold.

Adoptive families are encouraged to work on developing this skill. Many of the adoptees—international or domestic—arriving in the family have been traumatized through no fault of their own. Some will recover fully. Others will recover in part. Recovery or progress may take years—often well into late adolescence.

Review progress periodically, noting even the smallest steps. Think to the time the adoptee was placed in your home and ask, “What has changed?” Likely, you will see many things. Write them down and look at the list periodically. This method helps parents realize that their efforts have not been in vain. Stamina to continue is renewed. Share the list with the birth and/or previously adopted children who have been developing more typically than their sibling. They need to see that all of the sacrifices are making a difference. Please also keep in mind the words of this adoptive father,

“I hope that my other children will learn what their mother and dad can go through to maybe help them when they get older, when they become parents, what it takes to be a family, how far sometimes a mother and dad have to go. Maybe when one of the older kids might have trouble down the road they’ll know their mother and dad will go to great lengths to help every member of the family.”

This dad’s words reflect the biggest positive parents have to offer their troubled children as well as the healthy ones—the value of being a part of a family with a parent or parents to care for and about you. Make this the first item on your list as you “look back.”