00;00;10;12 - 00;00;37;00

Speaker 1

It's very important to the health of that child to see that it's okay to still love my mom, but I can still love you, too. And that does more than anything for the health and mental well-being of these kids. I wish that all of my kids had another mom that loved them as much as I do.

00;00;41;04 - 00;00;52;25

Speaker 2

Welcome to Adjusting the Sales, a podcast for parents, caregivers and service providers for children with Disabilities. I'm your host, Courtney Ring Staff, and this is my co-host, Melina Danko.

00;00;53;05 - 00;00;55;27

Speaker 3

Hi, everyone. We are so glad you've joined us.

00;00;56;07 - 00;01;26;17

Speaker 2

Melina is the assistant director of communications and marketing at the Center for Excellence in Disabilities and the project director of the West Virginia Family two Family Health Information Center. I am a licensed social worker in Morgantown, West Virginia, and I've created this podcast to be a platform for parents, caregivers and service providers and come together, exchange information, educate one another, and find support and connection through the relatable topic discussions.

00;01;27;11 - 00;01;36;12

Speaker 2

We cannot change the direction of the wind or the strength of the storm, but together we can adjust the sails.

00;01;40;17 - 00;02;06;27

Speaker 1

My name is Tracey Wood. I am a speech language pathologist as well as a mom of seven children and a special needs son. My husband's name is Jeremy. We have been married for 22 years. We started out thinking that we were going to have two children and that definitely grew as time went on. We have three biological children and we have three adopted children.

00;02;07;00 - 00;02;38;22

Speaker 1

Our oldest is 19 years old. His name is Keegan. And then we have Christopher, who is 15, and he is adopted and then we have Connor, who is 14, and he is a biological child. We have Colin is ten years old and Kirsten is eight. Gavin is eight, almost nine. Technically, Gavin is adopted legal guardianship. And then we have baby Kinsley, who is 18 months, who is our extra baby.

00;02;38;22 - 00;02;40;09

Speaker 1

So she's kind of like our foster kiddo.

00;02;41;10 - 00;02;47;24

Speaker 2

How many kids have you fostered over the years and when did your foster journey start?

00;02;47;28 - 00;03;17;27

Speaker 1

Our foster journey actually started significantly before we had children. I always knew that I love babies and I wanted babies. And I ran across some family members of people that I worked with about 20 years ago, and we decided that we wanted to help this young mom. And so we have had about 25 to 30 children come in and out of our homes over the last 22 years.

00;03;18;15 - 00;03;18;27

Speaker 1

Wow.

00;03;19;06 - 00;03;22;01

Speaker 3

That's a lot of kids. Yeah, it was a lot of heartache.

00;03;22;08 - 00;03;40;29

Speaker 1

There were times when we thought children were going to stay forever and they didn't. And then there were times that we knew it was going to only be temporary and we loved them as much as we could while we had them and gave them as much as we could as far as skills and love and sent them back to the birth families.

00;03;40;29 - 00;03;51;28

Speaker 1

And most of them are thriving and doing well. We are still in contact with, I would say, 90% of the kids that we have had in our home.

00;03;52;12 - 00;03;54;03

Speaker 3

How did you get involved in fostering?

00;03;54;07 - 00;04;27;13

Speaker 1

Well, involved in the DHHS, our fostering was through my work. Gavin was actually our first official foster child and his baby sister because they were actually removed by CPS. We had to go through all of the classes and trainings in order to have our home inspected and all of that. Prior to that, we had really just tried to help families that we came across, that God put in our pathways and we followed where He led.

00;04;28;10 - 00;04;50;22

Speaker 1

It came from a bunch of places. Some of them were distant family members, some of them were friends of friends, and they just reached out and Jeremy and I were compelled to help them and not only help the children, but help the parents and the families and hoping that we would be able to help them gain the skills that they needed to be successful on their own.

00;04;52;09 - 00;04;56;20

Speaker 2

So tell us about your journey with Gavin and how you got connected to him for foster care.

00;04;57;26 - 00;05;24;11

Speaker 1

Gavin It was an interesting situation. I had a service coordinator from work call me and say, Hey, we have this corral we need to do a feeding evaluation on. I'm always up for a feeding evaluation. Sounds good. She hands me the address. I go, You know, go to do the home visit. And I walk in the door and there's this little boy sitting in a ripton chair, which is a modified chair.

00;05;24;21 - 00;05;51;14

Speaker 1

He was kind of strapped down in it because he obviously had a physical disability. He was crying. His face had lots of scratches on it. He was hooked up to tubes and cords. And I thought to myself, What did I just walk into? Definitely one of those fly catching moments for my mouth that I really tried to keep my jaw off the floor and said, Hi, I'm Traci.

00;05;51;14 - 00;06;14;01

Speaker 1

I'm here to do a feeding evaluation. Tell me what your challenges are today. That's where my journey with Gavin began. So I started as his therapist and would visit him weekly when I was able to get into the home. About eight months later, he was removed by Child Protective Services and his nurse took him in as the primary.

00;06;14;01 - 00;06;38;15

Speaker 1

Foster parent and she said, Hey, you've been working with him for a while. Would you like to help me with some respite care? And so I became enrolled in DHHS. HHR and got started with the foster classes and became his respite provider and he would spend the weekends with us. And then after he spent weekends, then he would spend four days with us, then five days.

00;06;38;15 - 00;07;05;14

Speaker 1

Then the nurse said we didn't want this to be a permanent place in it for us. What would you think about taking him on? That was just one of those things that just kind of naturally rolled into our laps. As that happened, we developed a relationship with his birth mom. Eventually, through all of the back and forth, she asked us if we would take care of him for an indefinite period of time.

00;07;05;24 - 00;07;10;14

Speaker 1

And that's kind of where we landed on and he became part of our family.

00;07;11;06 - 00;07;17;11

Speaker 2

What's your relationship like with the birth mom now and how has it evolved from what it was in the beginning?

00;07;18;16 - 00;07;43;26

Speaker 1

Our relationship with birth mom. Her name is Kate and it was Rocky and it was very rocky to start with, as you can understand, you know, having your child removed, being placed with these strangers and I really want him back. And I don't know why this is happening to me. So I had reached out to her once or twice and no response.

00;07;44;14 - 00;08;10;19

Speaker 1

Then I had seen her at visits and did my best to engage with her, have conversation with her, and just kind of get to know each other after probably two or three months. We started visits and she has an older son also and he said, Mom, I want you to be friends with Tracy. I like her. And so his mom approached me with that and said, Gage said that we need to be friends.

00;08;11;06 - 00;08;32;06

Speaker 1

So I'd like to see what that looks like. And I said, absolutely. And so I reached out to her again on Facebook and said, Hey, I just want you to know that, you know, we're really supportive of your relationship with Gavin, with the other kids. We really want to work together to help best outcome, whatever it may be.

00;08;32;18 - 00;08;52;13

Speaker 1

So she decided that we would maybe meet it a little bit more often than what the courts said was the minimum. We got permission that I was allowed to be the visit supervisor, so we didn't have this strange person watching us and writing down what we did. And basically my job was just to make sure that the children were safe.

00;08;52;18 - 00;09;13;17

Speaker 1

It wasn't to critique her or any of the above. And once we kind of developed that relationship, we started having a lot of extra visits. I invited her to my house. I went to her house. We'd meet at the playground, you know, just kind of spending more time letting her see how I interacted with Gavin, how the other kids were very responsive to me.

00;09;13;26 - 00;09;38;21

Speaker 1

It's really evolved over the years, and I would say that she's a friend of mine now. It's not at all an adversarial thing. We have those tough conversations. Sometimes there definitely have been rocky roads based on good social media issues with, you know, family members commenting, well, when are you taking Gavin back or telling me, why do you talk to the person that abused him?

00;09;39;04 - 00;10;02;20

Speaker 1

A lot of those things are really tough for us, but we've really been good about communicating those things back and forth and pretty much telling these other people to you can either be involved and be positive or you could kick rocks. I mean, that's pretty much where we stand on that. There have been times that she's talked about, oh, I think that I want Gavin back.

00;10;02;20 - 00;10;21;20

Speaker 1

And then we talk about, okay, well, what about this? What about that? Is that really best? Would you like to just see him more and spend more time with him? And we've been able to have all of those very difficult conversations, not without tears and not without hard feelings at times, but knowing that we have Gavin's best interests in mind.

00;10;21;25 - 00;10;23;17

Speaker 1

I feel like we make a really great team.

00;10;24;10 - 00;10;30;00

Speaker 3

So, Traci, talk to us about Gavin's complex medical needs and what supports are helpful.

00;10;30;21 - 00;11;01;27

Speaker 1

As far as complex medical needs. When Gavin was born, he had a brain injury due to lack of oxygen. There was a lot of birth trauma involved. And so he has parts of cerebral palsy. His technical diagnosis is hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy, but he also has CP type things. They've diagnosed him with cortical vision impairment. He has a lot of motor deficits.

00;11;02;08 - 00;11;29;26

Speaker 1

He's non-ambulatory and he's non-verbal. So that creates those challenges. He also has a lot of spastic movements that can be difficult to move him or difficult to get him dressed, difficult to bathe him. He's also heavy, and since he doesn't stand on his own transfers and picking him up from one place to another can be a challenge for some people.

00;11;29;26 - 00;11;52;26

Speaker 1

And that's also a challenge in finding caregivers for him, because you have to be a pretty physically fit person to do that, and even so, you can get hurt. So really trying to make sure that we have enough people to help. It's becoming more of a challenge to beat him. And so sometimes it takes two people because of some of those physical constraints.

00;11;52;28 - 00;12;15;20

Speaker 1

Care for him can be a challenge. I question what his cognitive deficits are. I don't think that there are many based on MRI's and where the damage to the brain was not a whole lot in the language and processing centers, mostly in the motor cortex. He has a lot of he had a tracheostomy placed when he was a month old.

00;12;15;27 - 00;12;41;29

Speaker 1

He was on a vent. He has a feeding tube, so he's completely gy tube fed. He had a lot of equipment when he first came. We have worked through a lot of those. We have kept him healthy and he is growing. And last year we had his tracheostomy removed, so he no longer has a break. Here's a nice big, pretty scar, but we just call it his battle wound and he was able to have it removed.

00;12;41;29 - 00;13;09;03

Speaker 1

It's been out for a year and we've had zero issues with it since. It's really increased his quality of life, not having that tracheostomy when he gets sick. It's a little scary because I have one less hole that I can suction. But he has done really, really well. So now we've opened up into the world of being able to swim, being able to go to the ocean and roll around in the sand without having to worry about sand getting in his truck.

00;13;09;23 - 00;13;39;12

Speaker 1

He has a power wheelchair, he has walkers, he has gait trainers. We still suction frequently just because he doesn't have a really good progressive cough. And other than the G Tube right now, we've really minimized the number of devices and equipment medically specific that we have to carry with us when we go places. He also has an augmentative communication device for speech and he uses that to communicate and tell us what he wants and needs.

00;13;39;12 - 00;13;46;09

Speaker 1

And mostly it's You Tube. Typical eight year old stuff. Likes to watch the YouTube.

00;13;46;15 - 00;14;09;04

Speaker 2

What would you say to a family who is considering fostering a child who does require a lot of equipment? You know, you mentioned like the wheelchairs, the trainers, the lifts, all of those types of things that communication devices like that can be really intimidating for a family who, you know, is not in the disability world and doesn't know all of those different technologies available.

00;14;10;00 - 00;14;39;03

Speaker 1

So I would say don't be intimidated. These are still just kids and everything has its time and place. A lot of our equipment we've acquired over the last five years, it wasn't stuff that just all of a sudden overtook our house. A lot of it is funded 100%. As a foster parent, there's a lot of support for you, there's a lot of support financially.

00;14;39;15 - 00;15;07;07

Speaker 1

And so it's actually not a huge burden that you might think taking on this medically fragile child. Foster parents are very well equipped financially to meet the needs of their kids. Medical cards, everything covered 100%. I haven't had to pay for anything as far as wheelchairs. Gate trainer's eye gaze devices Medicaid will cover for all of that for your foster kids.

00;15;07;16 - 00;15;35;22

Speaker 1

Not always true for your bio kid, but also for adoption. It's still available for you, so don't be afraid. It's one step at a time and take your goals that you have for that moment. I usually try to set a goal for the year. Last year we didn't do anything physically as far as getting him to be a gate trainer or crawling or pulling up or anything like that.

00;15;35;22 - 00;15;56;23

Speaker 1

Last year our goal was to get that track out, everything surrounded, all of that. This year my goal is to get him moving again. We have looked into getting a pool and because of aquatic therapy and getting him moving and adding some more leisure skills, the first year that I had him, our goal was to get him communicating.

00;15;57;02 - 00;16;17;24

Speaker 1

And so we worked on getting the communication device. So there's a lot that can be overwhelming. Try not to get overwhelmed and just take it one step at a time that small goals and work on them until they're achieved and then move on. Because the harder you work at trying to do everything all at once, you'll get overwhelmed and nothing gets accomplished.

00;16;17;25 - 00;16;22;14

Speaker 1

It's like the jack of all trades, master of none. Well, we're going to be the master of one at a time.

00;16;23;05 - 00;16;41;22

Speaker 3

I think that's really great advice because all of the things that you've shared, you've met those goals. And so when you say our only goal for the first year was to get him communicating, and earlier you told us that he uses an AC device to communicate with you and express his wants and his needs and his feelings. That feels attainable.

00;16;42;03 - 00;16;53;13

Speaker 3

Where I think you're right sometimes things can seem so overwhelming and we feel like we have to do all of the things all at once. So I think that's really good advice.

00;16;55;13 - 00;16;59;07

Speaker 3

What has been the hardest part about fostering and what has been the best part?

00;17;00;27 - 00;17;24;24

Speaker 1

I would say the hardest part is the unknown. Not knowing whether he was staying, whether he was going, waiting for that permanency. That was probably the most difficult because you didn't want to turn your world completely upside down if he wasn't going to stay. Once Mom gave me that, yes, this is what I want. Then we just told the courts this is what we want.

00;17;25;03 - 00;17;52;26

Speaker 1

And Mom's on board and I'm on board. So everybody else jump on the train because here we go. And that was probably the most difficult part. My kids my other kids that were already here, Gavin, came to us last before the baby, and the kids just embraced it. They were so excited to help. They were so excited to have him there.

00;17;53;19 - 00;18;17;04

Speaker 1

I don't feel like we ever had a moment where the kids went, Oh, why is he here now? As he's become their brother, it's Gavin Slobbered on me. Tell him to keep his hands to himself. Gavin pulled my hair. I pull, I pushed him back. And we're like, okay, guys. He's become a sibling. He is equally a sibling as any of them.

00;18;17;13 - 00;18;38;19

Speaker 1

All of my other children were adopted at birth. Gavin came to us when I was three. It was a little bit different, but they definitely embraced him as their sibling and treat him as such, and he treats them as such. I would say seeing them and seeing their compassion for people and sharing that with me is one of the best.

00;18;39;04 - 00;19;05;06

Speaker 1

I have some that are more involved than others. They all have their place in Gavin's life, and Gavin has his place in theirs. Just seeing and just thinking about long term. We have so many kids. I feel confident that someone will be able to take care of him. After I passed that he won't be left alone. Which is also the other reason we have such a close relationship with his birth family, because he has more brothers and sisters there too.

00;19;05;18 - 00;19;13;19

Speaker 1

There's ten total. So between ten kids, I think that they all love Gavin and Will make sure that someone is always looking out for him.

00;19;14;13 - 00;19;33;00

Speaker 2

So with that question, I kind of expected you to say like fear of reunification. You didn't say that. And you've also fostered, you know, 25 to 30 kids. So can you talk about, like how you protect yourself from just the fear of losing that child, that you have created this attachment and bond with.

00;19;34;02 - 00;19;59;09

Speaker 1

When the situation isn't going well? You fear that reunification, but if you know that they're going back to a good situation, it's not a fearful thing. It's a more of an expanding your family. A lot of my kids, like I said, I have relationships with 90% of them that have gone home to their birth families. And I have relationships with the birth families.

00;19;59;28 - 00;20;28;03

Speaker 1

We go on trips, we invite them over for activities and we spend time together. So I don't know that it's really a loss. It's more of a change in relationship. I do believe that the first few that were reunified, I wasn't shopping for kids. I was thinking that I was. But then I realized what fostering was really about.

00;20;28;03 - 00;20;53;23

Speaker 1

And it's what's best for the kids. And it doesn't matter how long you've had a child. There is a bond to their biological family. That nature versus nurture thing is real. It's best for the kids. I believe all of our adopted children know that they are adopted. They have always known that they were adopted. It was never a secret that I always wanted them to trust me.

00;20;54;04 - 00;21;22;00

Speaker 1

And I felt if we ever kept that a secret, that there would be a breach of trust. Having a good relationship with those birth families guarantees most of the time a continued relationship after permanency is established, whether it's with me or with them. And so two of my adopted children have relationships with their brothers and sisters and their parents.

00;21;22;13 - 00;21;45;02

Speaker 1

We are open to this is Gavin's birth mom is still his mom. Christopher's birth mom is his aunt Sarah now. And so we kind of let the kids kind of pick that and decide what what you have, what you're comfortable with and go with it. And all the brothers and sisters. We came up with the catch phrase called brother, cousin.

00;21;45;28 - 00;22;15;20

Speaker 1

And so you're kind of brother cousins or your kind of brother or sister cousins. Then the kids actually came up with that and us adults just rolled with it because. Do you want to explain it? No, not really. And so that's just what they decided to call each other. And so we just go with it. And like I said, there are times that you have this tough conversation and those tough things come along, but they're just bumps in the road and we recover very well as long as we have good communication.

00;22;17;12 - 00;22;27;18

Speaker 2

One more question about that. In your experience and opinion, what is the foster parent role in facilitating the reunification piece?

00;22;28;17 - 00;22;56;22

Speaker 1

I think the foster parent role is very important as far as reunification because the idea is for these kids in most scenarios to go back to their birth families. There are, you know, extenuating circumstances where that can't happen, shouldn't happen, etc.. But it's really important for foster families to feel comfortable talking to the birth families and having that relationship.

00;22;56;23 - 00;23;23;10

Speaker 1

I personally believe being able to have adults that support that relationship just really gives those kids a sense of comfort when one or the other isn't present. It really gives them some good self-esteem and knowing that they're loved because being removed from your birth family is that's probably the biggest thing, is why didn't they want me? Why didn't they keep me?

00;23;23;11 - 00;23;50;15

Speaker 1

Why wasn't I am more important than the drugs? Why wasn't I more important than the boyfriend? Why wasn't I more important? When those relationships are developed between the foster families and the birth families, they just know everybody loves them. And that's all that matters. And that does more than anything for the health and mental well-being of these kids.

00;23;51;01 - 00;24;04;09

Speaker 3

So we've been talking about support systems within your family and within Gavin's family. But I know that you have a whole village of people that come and help you care for Gavin. Can you tell us what that support system looks like?

00;24;05;01 - 00;24;26;22

Speaker 1

We have nursing care that comes in daily to help us with, you know, meeting his needs, making sure that he's attended to while I attend to other children, while I'm at work. He also goes to school, and so we have a team of therapists that work with him at school, and he has a one on one nurse that follows him at school.

00;24;26;28 - 00;24;52;25

Speaker 1

She's also a home nurse. So we get to have that good communication between school and home. We have a respite person that comes in and helps do some babysitting on the weekends so that my husband and I can still have somewhat of a date night here and there. Even without Gavin, date nights are still a challenge and we have lots of family that comes in and helps with Gavin, helps with the other kids.

00;24;53;26 - 00;24;58;09

Speaker 1

We're very fortunate to have all the supports that we have.

00;24;59;28 - 00;25;04;02

Speaker 3

Tracy, you mentioned that Gavin goes to school. So what does school look like for him?

00;25;04;21 - 00;25;31;11

Speaker 1

Gavin gets on the bus about 730 in the morning. I get him dressed, I give him his morning allergy medicine because that's the only meds he takes, put his braces on him, strap him down in his wheelchair, and I load him on a bus and he rides a bus to school and his nurse meets him at school. Up until this year, he was in a regular education classroom with his typical peers doing exactly what they were doing at the end of last year.

00;25;31;12 - 00;25;56;05

Speaker 1

He started to get a little upset about being in the classroom and was somewhat disruptive with some of his noises. My daughter is actually in his class and so I was always able to kind of go, Well, what do you think? Should Gavin go to a special ed classroom for a little bit? She's like, No, I think he needs to be with us.

00;25;57;11 - 00;26;20;27

Speaker 1

But after our IEP meeting, we found that he was working a whole lot better in a quieter environment, that sometimes that number of people in the room was overwhelming to him. And so he was getting a little bit more education in a smaller classroom. So he did find his home base this year in the special ed room. There's nine kids, three or four adults, but he does have his own space there.

00;26;21;10 - 00;26;53;05

Speaker 1

He grew a lot over the summer. We upped his feeding schedule and so I think the added weight and the increased demands of education makes him tired. So being in a special ed room kind of allows him to have a nap, to be able to, you know, rest when he needs to work, when he needs to. I always wanted him in the typical classroom because I think cognitively he can keep up and he does.

00;26;53;19 - 00;27;15;25

Speaker 1

However, it wasn't really what was best for him. It's truly his least restrictive environment to be in that special ed classroom. But he goes out for gym class. He goes out for music and art and any of the specials that he wants to participate in, he learns the concepts. Even without being in those classrooms. We make sure that he's getting the content.

00;27;15;28 - 00;27;48;19

Speaker 1

But sometimes those environments are a little overwhelming for him. So he does spend a lot of time in the special ed classroom. Then he comes home about 345, rides the bus home, and the nurse or myself meets him at the bus and we bring him in the house and then he has his evening at home. Sometimes it consists of hockey practice for the older kids or going to an outing or a lot of sports and other school engagements that he attends with us.

00;27;50;06 - 00;28;09;01

Speaker 1

He we try to get him to participate as much as we can. They send him homework. We do it when we can. But he's actually on his second grade reading level and his second grade math level. So he's doing the same things that my daughter is doing. Just have to modify some of the assignments by, you know, physical modification.

00;28;09;06 - 00;28;29;28

Speaker 1

His nurse writes his answers for him. He communicates them with his device and then she writes things down. So she's a scribe. Things have to be read aloud to him sometimes depending upon what it is, just for better auditory comprehension. So he has an IEP, the individual education plan to meet his needs and give him access to the general ed curriculum.

00;28;30;06 - 00;28;50;25

Speaker 1

As far as school goes, he's doing really well and the school is very supportive of all of his needs. We were excited they remodeled the school, so instead of having to go into a side door to get into school, he walks right in the front door with everybody else right up the ramp and yeah, so school is a really positive experience for Gavin.

00;28;51;20 - 00;29;03;08

Speaker 3

Since you touched on hockey, I know that you've been a big advocate in getting some community activities going in your area. Can you tell us about what you did recently to get some kids out on the ice?

00;29;04;18 - 00;29;35;06

Speaker 1

The Augusta Leavey Learning Center is a private school for children's autism and Easterseals is our local rehabilitation center for kids and adults. And they came together and made a program called Inclusion on ICE. And this is the second year for it. And they brought in the Wheeling Naylor's hockey team and some other adapted hockey teams that use sled hockey for individuals that can't walk.

00;29;35;07 - 00;29;58;03

Speaker 1

They also have blind hockey, which is really cool. It's this metal puck and people with vision impairment are able to play hockey, which is really cool to watch. So all of these events have become an annual thing for kids with disabilities that would love to experience these things and otherwise wouldn't have that opportunity. They take all the wheelchairs out on ice.

00;29;58;09 - 00;30;11;18

Speaker 1

They have walkers that go out on the ice and just make sure that the kids all have a super fun day to get to experience what other typical kids do all the time.

00;30;11;18 - 00;30;24;24

Speaker 3

Adding on that, you've shared with me that sometimes parents who have kids with disabilities will see you out on the ice with Gavin and be completely amazed and shocked like, I can't believe you're out there doing that. And that is encourage them to go out and try that with their child.

00;30;26;11 - 00;30;48;11

Speaker 1

Yes, absolutely. And people will see us walk it while see us roll in with the wheelchair and then put him in the walker and put ice skates on his little braces. And he just goes out there and pushes around and his brothers and sisters take him for a lap around the rink. And we really encourage them all to go out there and help.

00;30;48;25 - 00;31;13;10

Speaker 1

We have a lot of support there. A lot of my kids go and volunteer to help other kids get out on the ice. And then we have, like I said, a lot of community support that helps these kids go out there. And so I think part of Gavin going out on the ice is not only for his enjoyment, but to show others that it can be done and that where there's a will, there's a way.

00;31;13;13 - 00;31;14;28

Speaker 3

What is a piece of advice.

00;31;14;28 - 00;31;20;15

Speaker 2

That you would give to a family who's considering fostering a child with a disability?

00;31;21;23 - 00;31;54;21

Speaker 1

Just do it. Nike, swoosh. Just do it. It will fulfill your life. Fulfill your family. It has so many blessings in disguise that you can't even count. Just seeing that you've made the difference in the life of one child. I get chills thinking about it. I just. It's been such a life changing for the better situation for us, for my family.

00;31;55;13 - 00;32;26;26

Speaker 1

We just love Gavin and can't imagine life without him and all of the heartaches and all of the ups and downs are always worth it. There's a pot of gold at the end of it. It's just really important to know about the need and not to be afraid of the unknown. If we wouldn't have taken Gavin and his nurse, he would have ended up in a medical facility, was more of a nursing home and a three year old doesn't belong there.

00;32;27;06 - 00;32;44;24

Speaker 1

These babies don't belong there. They need to be in homes with loving parents, thriving with their families, in their communities. And there are supports out there. And I wouldn't let the disability stop you from welcoming a child into your home.

00;32;45;16 - 00;33;08;14

Speaker 2

We're going to put some information in the show notes. We know that a third of the children in foster care currently have disabilities, too. And they're the ones that are majority wise making up group homes and treatment programs because there's not foster homes willing to accept placement because they're scared. And so I hope this demystifies that.

00;33;08;24 - 00;33;37;26

Speaker 1

And the thought of Gavin being in a group home. I can't imagine the potential that would be wasted for him to just have his basic needs met. And that's kind of the situation that he was in in the first place, even though his basic needs weren't met and that's why he was removed. But that minimalist care is all that's available in a group home, and that's not what helps these kids thrive and grow.

00;33;38;17 - 00;34;09;23

Speaker 1

And there are supports out there to help people, even to help those families, because sometimes specifically in our case, I don't know that that Gavin's birth family was given all of those resources. And with those supports, I feel that she could have been able to meet his needs at home. I think sometimes we're so quick to judge a situation.

00;34;10;18 - 00;34;35;02

Speaker 1

Gavin, one of his major reasons why he was removed was because of malnutrition. He was £22 at three years old. And when I actually to know Mom, I asked and said, why wasn't he being fed? And she said, Well, the doctors told me we shouldn't make him gain too much weight. It'll be hard on his breathing. So I figured if we missed a meal here and there, it would be okay.

00;34;36;19 - 00;35;02;28

Speaker 1

Complete and total misunderstanding. And that long term led to a lot of issues. And so that education is so important. She didn't have transportation to get to those appointments. How easy is it to find medical transportation? She didn't know about it. So there are so many things that would prevent these kids from being in a group home and not having a loving parent.

00;35;03;00 - 00;35;28;14

Speaker 1

She loves Gavin, there is no doubt about it. And I 100% support anybody that loves my kid. I'm sure that under most circumstances, those kids, their parents love them. They just didn't know how to care for them. So they needed the support. And a lot of these are young moms and they don't have the supports necessary. They didn't have parents either and they didn't have people to support them.

00;35;28;22 - 00;36;01;17

Speaker 1

And so they don't know. And so just getting that education out there and supporting these families and creating these communities, I feel like part of our foster journey was creating our community, our circle of people, and showing that we have supports there, you know, grandparent communities. I know there was some initiative at some point about the hope, a project that they were trying to encourage that we had young people, old people, middle people, working people, stay at home people all in one community.

00;36;01;18 - 00;36;35;29

Speaker 1

So that village was there. And the village is what raises the kids. Yes, you need parents, but you need a community of support. Some of these young moms and some of these kids that end up in foster care, they're just lacking their village. And if their village is there, they stay in check. I feel that the beginning of our unofficial foster journey was helping those families have a village and have some resources and learn some things, no matter how old they get.

00;36;36;19 - 00;37;01;02

Speaker 1

These kids feel a loss being taken away from people that they were birthed to. And some kids don't ever get over that, especially if it's a relationship that could have happened, that could have been fostered. And so I feel really strongly about keeping those birth families close, even if they aren't able to care for their child long term.

00;37;01;09 - 00;37;05;26

Speaker 1

That having a relationship is really important to those kids.

00;37;09;03 - 00;37;24;22

Speaker 3

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