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Our view: Learn how to adopt a hard-to-place child

If we could promote more adoptions, we would be able to provide stable, loving homes for children who would otherwise struggle with poverty, abuse or neglect.

How many times have we read about a youngster who has gotten into trouble, and wondered whether that child could have followed a different path if he or she had grown up in a different environment. Wouldn't adoption solve some of those challenges the child faces?

If only adoption were that simple. But it's not, and that's why Family Services of Northwestern Pennsylvania has organized a training program to bring together adoptive parents and professionals who place children into adoptive and foster homes.

The program, which takes place next Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Shrine Club, features an impressive array of experts, including Debbie Riley, author of "Beneath the Mask: Understanding Adopted Teens," and Rita Soronen, executive director of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. Thomas, the founder of Wendy's Restaurants, was both an adoptee and an adoptive father; the restaurant chain is named after one of his daughters. The foundation focuses on "dramatically increasing" the number of foster children who find permanent homes.

The program offered by Family Services will cover how to talk to children about adoption, how to understand developmental and psychological tasks of adoptive families, and how children are affected by loss, grief, abuse and trauma.

Diane Murphy, director of adoption/kinship services at Family Services, doesn't gloss over the challenges of adopting hard-to-place children. These children are usually older, often minorities and may have siblings who also need a home.

You need more than love to make it work. But she stresses that with the right training and resources, adoptive placements can be a success for families and for the children.

"When they come into foster care, there's a reason they are there," she says. "The parents used drugs or maybe (the children) were abused in some fashion. The important thing to remember is there is a lot of training out there and a lot of support out there to help those who would be open to parenting these children," she says.

The Nov. 12 program is also for those who are considering adoption. By attending this function, they will learn that "you aren't alone out there," Murphy says.

In Pennsylvania, about 2,000 children are waiting for permanent homes, Murphy said. But if you consider opening your arms to children in need, you will need perspective on what these children have endured and how they developed coping skills to survive. This program can open your eyes, as well as your arms.

For more information, call 866-4568 or visit www.fsnwpa.org. Deadline to register is Nov. 11.