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"LOOK FOR THE REWARDS EVERY DAY" says this foster care family.

## Case Study: Family Tackles Raising Foster Children

Community Health and Counseling has offered the following release concerning a family that raised foster children:

Patty and Bart have always enjoyed working with children. They raised two older children who no longer live at home. Patty always seemed to be lending a helping hand with her relatives' children. It was something that came naturally and that they both enjoyed.

Once their two older children were grown and out of the house, the thought of becoming foster parents became more and more prevalent in their day-to-day thinking. Patty actually attended a few meetings, looking for information and getting a sense of what the commitment might be for both her and Bart. At one of the informal meetings, they decided to fill out some paperwork.

When Patty was growing up, she had been separated from her siblings. She knew what it was like to experience the pain of being separated from them and knew that if she became a foster parent, she would want to take in siblings, so they would never have to be separated, as she once was so many years ago.

While in the process of obtaining their foster home license, Patty and Bart received a call that came sooner than expected. She was asked to take in two siblings. Siblings are often difficult to place for obvious reasons. Knowing that Patty and Bart were willing to do this, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) made contact with them immediately to ask for their assistance with the two children, who were in need of a loving and caring home.

Patty and Bart's two grown children had different opinions about their parents going through the process of taking on foster children. The oldest son supported it and knew the children would find a loving home with his parents. Her daughter, a bit more apprehensive, soon changed her opinion after meeting the two younger children.

Within two years of first taking in the two siblings, Patty and Bart opened their home once more to more siblings from the same fam-

ily. They were now caring for four young children. The children had lived difficult lives and had come to their home with a lot of "baggage," things they had never had to deal with while raising their two older children. Patty attributes the support received from Community Health and Counseling Services (CHCS), DHHS and the Guardian Ad Litum for giving both her and her husband the encouragement they needed to meet the challenges facing them. Bart has always been an equal partner in the support with the children.

"We had a strong marriage to start with and taking on all of this strengthened it even more. We know each other very well and were able to make joint decisions. I also give glory to God for allowing us to be able to do what we have done," said Patty in the release.

When they first accepted the children into their home, Patty gave up her nursing career. One of the children had severe medical needs. Patty's nursing background gave her the skills required to attend to those needs. It was a full-time job for her at home. This made it very difficult for Patty to leave but knew that she needed time to run errands and such. CHCS provided her with support that allowed her to leave for a few hours when necessary.

Patty was committed to caring for all the children, knowing that the treatment level was incredible. She trusts the person from CHCS, who she often refers to as her "right hand."

"CHCS stepped in to relieve me when I needed to go out for awhile. It was nice to know that I could leave the children with a 'second mother.' Everything was put in place so that I could leave and feel comfortable about it," said Patty.

Patty and Bart never asked for more than they needed, even when the opportunity came to receive more support. They were happy that the support was there, but were determined to do most of it themselves.

After nine years with the children, and having taken the steps to adopt all four, Patty

and Bart believe that they have learned so much from them. The will to survive and thrive has been two of the biggest lessons they've learned. They have seen firsthand the changes that have happened to the children as they have grown throughout the years in their home. The children are now able to talk about all that happened to them in their earlier years and have learned from it. They've become very resilient.

The oldest of the four, Zoey, said that when she first was placed with the family, it was strange because she was young and didn't understand what was going on and wondered why she wasn't with her birth family.

When asked what she might share with someone considering taking on a child or children in their home to make them feel more comfortable, she said, "It was helpful that they gave me some space while at the same time interacting with me, helping me feel loved. I was able to talk to them about things."

She said that the counseling she received was very helpful, even if she didn't think so at the time. She hopes to be a veterinarian one day and has begun looking at schools. She said that some day, she might be interested in adopting a child of her own because of the positive experience she had with her adoption.

Patty and Bart work hard to give these children all they need and admit it hasn't always been easy. When asked what recommendations Patty would give to someone considering treatment foster care, she said, "You have to sit down with your spouse and think of the worse-case scenarios ... because they will happen. Make sure you have a list of other foster parents, because it's always good to have the peer support."

Patty and Bart raised their family and have grown their family by four when they opened their home to these children almost a decade ago. "You sometimes have to look for the rewards in every day. But, they are there," Patty said.

To learn more about treatment foster care, call 255-8473.