

THE TENNESSEAN

November 20, 2010

Every child deserves a loving, stable family

By **Barbara Pennington**

As we head into the holiday season, many of us will pause to say a brief word of thanks for our families — that wonderful group



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of people who help us through both the good and bad times in our lives, and who love all of our best attributes and see past our worst. Unfortunately, many children in Middle Tennessee will not have the loving support of a family this year.

There are hundreds of children — individual children and groups of siblings — in our state who have lost their birth parents for a variety of reasons and are waiting

for an adoptive family to take them in and call them their own. These children are yearning for the love of a family and a permanent place to call home.

Myths are simply that

There are a lot of myths about what it takes to adopt children today that are simply untrue.

Myth No. 1: You have to be a “perfect parent” or have a “perfect family.”

The ideal family for adoptive children is stable, supportive, loving and looking to welcome new members. You do not have to have a certain income or be of a particular ethnic or age group. You do not even have to have been a parent before. You simply must be willing to love a child for

who they are and prepared to offer them support and guidance.

Myth No. 2: Children seeking adoption are very troubled.

Children who have lost or been separated from their birth families are not scary or dangerous. Many have had difficult lives. They may have trouble trusting others or have attachment problems, and they may feel sadness, confusion or guilt over what they have experienced.

But, at the heart of it all, they are simply children who need love and stability.

The goal of any adoption is to create a match in the best interest of the children and the adoptive family. Some children may have special requirements.

Potential parents will learn about these and receive back-

ground information including family and medical histories during the adoption process. Additionally, in Tennessee, all adoptions are preceded by a six-month trial period to ensure the adoption arrangement is a good fit for all involved.

Myth No. 3: Adopting older children is a mistake.

There is a common perception that the older a child is, the more challenging he or she will be to parent or integrate into a new family. This simply isn't true. Teenagers can be as lovable and endearing as infants and are wonderful additions to a family.

It can be easy to dismiss an older child's needs — “He's practically an adult. What could he possibly need from me?” But, parenting and family ties do not end

when a child turns 18. Adoption is forever — a lifetime of holidays, celebrations and caring.

I encourage everyone to look in their hearts and homes and consider adopting a child or group of siblings.

Adoption allows you to give a child hope for the future and enrich your family in wonderful and unexpected ways.

There are multiple agencies in our region that can provide you with more information and connect you with people who have expanded their families through adoption.

Barbara Pennington is adoption coordinator at Centerstone. Centerstone's Adoption Services find permanent homes for children in foster care and facilitate the adoption process. For more information, call 615-478-8732 or e-mail Barbara.Pennington@centerstone.org.