

Teens least likely to be adopted

By Jake Hall, [ThreeSixty](#)
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Editor's note: The name of the 13-year-old source in this story has been changed to protect his privacy.



A stork delivers a teen complete with comic book and headphones in place. (Illustration by Emy Young of Mankato State University)

Allen, of Minneapolis, is 13 years old, plays football and likes “old rock and roll.” He has been in the foster care system for about five years, after being removed from the custody of his abusive mother after his father tragically ended his own life. In this article, his name has been changed to protect his privacy

After living with two different foster families, Allen was placed with a family. They have adopted children before.

Allen has lived with his new family for more than four months, and is in a pre-adoptive stage, meaning that the family is planning to adopt him.

Unfortunately, most teenagers in foster care aren't as lucky as Allen. Of the 598 minors adopted in 2010, 88 percent of them were younger than age 12, according to the Minnesota Department of Human Services 2010 report to the state legislature.

Nate and Jeanne Thompson, who are this reporter's uncle and aunt, have two years of experience being foster parents. Jeanne said she thinks prospective parents are hesitant to adopt teens because they worry about their ability to influence that child's values.

“To adopt a child, you want to pour (good values) into the child,” said Jeanne. “They've been half raised, and their morals and values have already been instilled in them. A lot of people have trouble with that. Some look at it as you're bringing in a problem into your home.”

But the Thompsons became foster parents after witnessing the struggles of a teenage friend of their children, including living with an abusive grandfather.

“My heart's desire is (to help) teens,” said Jeanne Thompson. “It's a period of time where they are in a place where they don't (understand) yet. I want to help them understand and get through it.”

The Thompsons are currently fostering three young children. Jeanne said another reason parents might be reluctant about fostering or adopting a teenager could be emotional problems a teen might have, like her three foster children, who have emotional baggage, even at their young age because their mother is in jail.

“Even kids as young as the ones we have here now, they come with baggage and issues that they have to work through,” said Nate Thompson. “These three little ones, they’ve been through it. They just don’t know how to express their feelings.”

Joe Wild Crea is a permanency specialist for Ampersand Families, an organization with the goal of advocating for teenagers who are in the foster system and find them adoptive parents. He works directly with teens to find them permanent homes with adoptive parents.

“People have a lot of pre-conceived notions, and we’ve got to get over those stereotypes,” said Wild Crea. “Our job really is to make (prospective parents) truly understand the kinds of impacts trauma and abuse have on a child. Often times kids get much better when they get in with their family.”

Wild Crea also believes that the rewards of adopting a teen can match those of a younger child, if not exceed them.

“I think one of our greatest challenges is increasing people’s true understanding that there are teens waiting and it can be a great thing for both the teen and the family,” said Wild Crea. “I love the perceptions of a teen and the observations that a teen makes of life as they start becoming more aware of the world around them. That’s a wonderful thing to bring into your home.”

Wild Crea said that adopting a teen definitely means a parent’s lifestyle will change, but adopting a teen can actually be less challenging in certain ways than adopting a younger child. Older children are often more independent, he said.

A teen may have experienced trauma because of whatever reason they were removed from biological parent’s custody, and it may be hard to work through, but the Thompsons believe it is worth the effort.

“Whether it is adoption or foster care, if you can make a difference in a child’s life, the rewards of it are above anything I can think of,” said Jeanne. “Even if you don’t see a difference, there will be a difference. It’s like planting a seed.”

Allen also believes that taking the time to help a child or teen in need of parents is a valuable experience, even if it takes a lot of effort from the parents.

“Be patient, cause kids like me (will be) really rebellious at first,” he said. “Keep going with them because you’ll love the fun times you get. Be confident (you can) give them a better life.”

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