

# adoption:

## Wanda

LIFELONG  
FAMILIES  
CASE STUDY

Wanda entered foster care at age 7 and experienced a number of placements, including a residential treatment program for four years before coming to Casey Family Services at age 14. Casey's social worker met with the state case worker to begin assessing Wanda's case. Her birth mother's parental rights had been terminated and her father was contesting the termination of his. The state agency had discontinued Wanda's visits with her father and siblings. Wanda had not seen her mother for many years and no one knew the mother's whereabouts.

Once Casey was involved, Wanda was placed from her group home into a Casey foster home. The Casey social worker met with Wanda and her resource parents, the Martins, to explain her role in getting Wanda out of foster care and into a family, the purpose of a permanency plan, and each of their respective roles. Wanda talked about the important people in her life and her hopes and dreams for a family. She related to adults easily and wanted to grow up in "a normal family," while also wanting to "have more independence," like all teenagers. Wanda had developmental delays due to a childhood of abuse, abandonment and multiple moves; and suffered from mood disorders, post-traumatic stress and academic delays from attending more than 10 schools since entering care.

After making sure the state agency was in agreement, the social worker assembled a Permanency Team by reaching out to people identified by Wanda: a mentor, her birth dad, an older brother and a previous foster parent. Wanda also wanted to be reconnected with her birth mom. The social worker added Wanda's attorney, current foster parents, a therapist and the state agency social worker to the team. She met with each team member individually and then convened the first large team meeting. The team met every four-six weeks, reviewing the youth's permanency plan periodically and making changes as needed to address her safety, permanency and well-being.

The state agency was not in favor of reconnecting Wanda with her birth father, since the court was terminating his parental rights; but the Casey social worker advocated for Wanda's need to have a relationship with him, even if he couldn't parent her. The social worker also networked with all team members and began searching for Wanda's mother online. She facilitated a

meeting between Wanda's dad and the Martins and after the state agreed, she reconnected Wanda with her dad and siblings.

Wanda was prepared for permanency using a timeline and life book to help her understand her past and get ready to join a forever family. During this process, Wanda became increasingly ambivalent about being adopted. Her birth mom, located by the Casey social worker, did not want to reconnect with Wanda. This was a very hard truth for Wanda to hear. About the same time, her dad's parental rights were terminated. Given the positive experience he'd had working with the team and her foster parents, Wanda's dad was able to give her permission to love them and be adopted.

After initially expressing interest in adopting her, the Martins became ambivalent. Wanda's aggressive behaviors had increased and they felt they couldn't keep her safe at home. At risk for psychiatric hospitalization, home-based services were provided and Wanda began Trauma-Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) with her foster parents. Pursuing the concurrent permanency plan, the team also began targeted recruitment efforts to identify another adoptive family.

During the recruitment process, the Martins realized they could not imagine her in any other family, and decided to adopt Wanda, who agreed. They took Wanda to an amusement park with her birth siblings and their respective foster families to celebrate. Contact with Wanda's dad became sporadic and, eventually, he moved out of the country. The Permanency Team helped Wanda and her adoptive parents identify supports that would continue after her adoption, and decided to continue the large team meetings after the state agency closed her case. Visits with her siblings continued after Wanda's adoption was finalized. Wanda's younger birth sister now has moved into her family's home, and plans are underway for her adoption, too.