



Blending a family is hard work.

Meet the Gaona Family Representative Schrader

Heather and Chris Gaona, together with their son Kaine, have been experiencing the transformative power of unconditional commitment. Since arriving to their home as a delayed, frightened toddler, Kaine has blossomed into a sociable, well-adjusted preschooler. Like many 4-year-olds, he is fascinated with Superheroes, enjoys building Legos creations, and likes to make up stories.

Kaine entered foster care at birth, and the Gaonas were his 6th placement! He came to them at age 2, undersized and underweight, with diagnoses of prenatal alcohol exposure, PTSD, and sensory integration deficits. He also had a history of behavioral problems and a vocabulary of just 25 words. In their hearts, the Gaonas claimed Kaine as their “forever son” almost immediately.

Each parent clearly remembers a moment when Kaine seemed to know he had found his permanent parents. For Chris, it occurred just a few months after his placement, when the little boy cuddled against his new dad and fell asleep on his shoulder. For Heather, the moment occurred a month later, when she asked Kaine to pose in his new Batman sweater and smile for a photo. “He displayed a genuine smile, without a hint of sadness in his eyes like in the previous pictures.”

Post adoption services have helped the Gaonas address various challenges. They appreciate the training and the networking available through a monthly support group, and the assistance they receive through Disability Services to help address Kaine’s sensory difficulties. They included their parents in some of their post adoption counseling sessions, which enabled the family “to create a consistent framework for Kaine.”

The Gaonas list three obstacles they have faced and overcome in adoption. The first was “stigma within our community,” with friends and family members expressing concern about an older child’s potential for harmful behaviors. Heather writes, “So often the child is seen as ‘broken’ or somehow at fault.” Her community’s reaction has motivated Heather to educate others about adoption.

The second obstacle the Gaonas faced was “lifestyle changes.” Heather explains, “Prior to Kaine, we both worked full time jobs and had disposable income to take regular vacations. We finally decided it would make more sense to have an at-home parent, at least in the beginning. This necessitated a change in budget, a change in income, and a change in extra-curricular activities.”

The third obstacle was “emotional upheaval and growing pains.” Chris states, “Blending a family is hard work. We all had our own emotional needs and expectations and they didn’t always align. Making ourselves vulnerable to one another and learning to trust one another were huge steps.”

Another obstacle that is difficult to overcome is the expense of private daycare or preschool. The Gaonas know of potential foster or adoptive families for whom these costs are prohibitive. They ask policy-makers to establish state-sanctioned day care offered at affordable rates.

Asked what adoption means to their family, the Gaonas agree, “We are bonded by something of our choice, which makes it that much stronger.”