

*"It's so worth the time and effort!"*



## Meet the Lopez-Stitt Family Representative DeFazio

Delighted with three exuberantly active, close-in-age sons, Debbie and Rodney believed their family was complete. That belief quickly changed when they learned of a great nephew in need of a safe home.

Baby Bryson arrived to the Stitts at age seven weeks. The family was able to adopt him two years later. Initially their new son was challenged by developmental delays and medical issues likely caused by prenatal drug exposure. Due to Plagiocephaly and Macrocephaly, he had to wear a helmet for 3 months to assure proper head shape and brain development. He also had a weakened trachea pipe and struggled with illness almost his entire first year. In addition to many appointments at Doernbecher Children's Hospital, Bryson also received Early Intervention services. Mom Debbie reports that the family never minded the extra time, care, and professional appointments needed because Bryson has always been such a pleasant child.

Now age 2 ½, this loving and likeable little fellow has made significant progress in overcoming his difficult infancy. His parents know that he may need more special services as he grows, but right now they are thrilled that Bryson is developmentally caught up. His verbal skills are age-appropriate, and he even surprises his family with astute observations and humorous comments. Bryson enjoys a balance of time at preschool and time at home playing with his older brothers Jeremiah, Joshua, and Josiah, now ages 10, 9, and 7.

Bryson also has birth siblings. Debbie and Rodney now care for Bryson's baby brother, whom they are in the process of adopting. Born in January, this baby too was affected by prenatal drug exposure.

The couple reached out first to Bryson and later to his brother because they believe in keeping siblings together and families intact. Debbie explains, "When we found out our great nephew was in public foster care away from his other siblings, we decided to make the sacrifice to be there for him. We thought in the beginning this might help our niece although it did not. She gave up and that is when we stepped forward to adopt. We love both boys so much!"

Raising five sons may seem overwhelming to some, but not to the Stitts. They rely upon a solid marriage, relevant life experience, and their Christian faith to persevere through difficult times. Notably, as a Disabled Navy Veteran, Rodney has learned to manage unpredicted challenges. As well, the couple was familiar with medical and development services because one of their older boys had some special needs. Debbie reports, "We didn't feel challenged because I knew what avenues to go forward with." The family appreciates the support they receive from Public Health nurses, from their "amazing" DHS caseworker Ashley Howell, and from families at Wellspring Baptist Church.

One policy change the Stitts recommend would be for more foster parent input on the CANS (Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths) assessment.

To others considering fostering or adopting, the Stitts write, "It is hard at times, but it's so worth the time and effort that one puts into it. These kids have nobody unless we choose to help them."