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Buckner Today

Special Edition



Be a Family.

There are children everywhere in need of a home. In need of love. In need of a family.

At Buckner, we believe that all children deserve to be a part of a family. We also believe that there are thousands of caring, Christian families with the potential to be a family to children in need. They just don't know it yet.

Each of the families interviewed in the following pages have chosen to be a family through foster care or adoption. They come from different pasts, live in different places and may have very different views on the best ways to raise children. But they do have one thing in common – they all have extra love to give.

- 4 Domestic Open Adoption – The Neimer Family
- 8 Texas Waiting Children/CPS Adoption – The Bray-McKlein Family
- 10 International Adoption – The Adkins Family
- 12 Foster to Adoption – The Craggett Family
- 14 Foster Care – The Nixon Family

Be a Family

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On the Cover: Mark and Jacquie Craggett, with children Kelsey, Kylee, Nathan and William (not pictured are daughters Courtney and Cara), have knitted their family together through foster care and adoption. (p. 12)

A Picture of Family.

The Adkins family fulfilled their definition of family when they adopted LiLi from China.

p.10



Part of the family.

Lindsey Rattan, or “My Lindsey” as Taylor and Will call her, has become a part of the Neimer’s family through open adoption. “Lindsey’s like the cool aunt,” Shelley said. “She’s the one who brings toys and love and fun.”

Family Redefined by Open Adoption

A lot can happen in eight years. Lindsey Rattan went to college, graduated, got married and started her career. But before she did any of that, she had a baby.

“It seems like a lifetime ago,” Lindsey said, while looking at a photo of herself in Buckner’s ‘New Beginnings’ magazine from 1999. She was only 17 years old as she held baby Taylor at the hospital, knowing she was about to place her into Brad and Shelley Neimer’s loving hands for adoption.

Little did she know that the Neimers would soon become more than just adoptive parents – they’d become her friends and confidantes.

Eight years ago, Lindsey was scared. “I was in denial,” she said. “I didn’t even know I was pregnant until I was seven months along.”

Lindsey’s high school boyfriend Tyler had a cousin who worked for Buckner Adoption, so they called her right away.

“That was the first time I had ever heard about open adoption. I thought it was crazy, but in a good way. I just didn’t even know it was possible for me to be a part of my child’s life. It was a huge relief. I knew at that moment that it was it.”

The couple started meeting with their counselor twice a week as she helped them walk through their options.

“We were only 17; we had no idea what it would take to raise a baby. She walked us through creating a budget, talked about the price of diapers ... we did a pros and cons list for us and the child. It was so evident as to what was the best thing to do.

“She never pushed adoption on us. She just gave us the resources we needed to make the best decision.”

Meanwhile, the Neimers were struggling with infertility. After a year’s worth of treatments and medications, they said, “forget it.”

“We had decided we were going to do international adoption through another adoption agency,” Shelley said.

It wasn’t until a nurse told them about a Baptist adoption agency named Buckner that she even considered going someplace else. As long-time Baptists, Shelley decided to look up the agency online and sent in her registration fee for

an upcoming adoption workshop.

“I found out the day of the meeting that it was only about open adoption,” she said. “I was like, no way! Not interested. But we had already sent in our money and I didn’t want to waste it. So we went.”

And that’s when everything changed.

“We felt the Lord’s presence in that place,” Shelley explained. “It was just a plain old building, but Jesus was in the walls. We decided in that moment that this was it.”

Within a few weeks, the Neimers researched everything they could about open adoption. They took their parents to another meeting so they could learn about it, finished their application, went in for an interview and were placed in the “book.”

That very same week, Lindsey and Tyler went to look through the parents’ profiles in the book. Lindsey took the profiles home and poured over every word.

“I had multiple highlighters and was going through to highlight the things I liked about each couple and the things I didn’t like,” Lindsey said. “When I finished, the Neimers profile didn’t have anything negative highlighted. I knew they were the ones.”

The next day, Shelley received a phone call from Buckner. She raced to grab a pen and paper to write down all the details she could about Lindsey and Tyler. Unable to reach

**Story by Jenny Pope
Photography by
Russ Dilday**



her husband Brad on the cell phone, she was forced to wait until he returned home to give him the good news.

When he walked in the door, Shelley smiled and said, "We're matched."

Building a Relationship

It's uncommon for adoptions to go as quickly as the Neimer's, but Shelley felt prepared.

"I know it may sound crazy, but I prayed about it. I said, 'God, is it gonna go fast?' He said, 'Shelley, get your running shoes on.'"

With only three and a half weeks left until Taylor's due date, their relationship didn't have much time to develop. They first met at the match meeting, where both sides of the family come together to meet and discuss whether or not they could have a truly open relationship.

"When we first met, we all stood in a circle and prayed," Lindsey recalled. "That's when I knew it was real. It was extremely powerful. It's hard to explain the emotion in that room. Our conversation was so natural – not awkward at all."

The next few weeks were filled with visits, shopping, and doctor's appointments. Shelley thinks of that period as their "engagement. I tell people all the time that open adoption is not a divorce, it's a marriage of families."

"Which was great because her family and ours had a lot in common," Brad interjected. "It's almost frightening. We have the same humor, the same likes and dislikes. We don't have to worry about hurting each other's feelings. It's very natural."

Both sides credit Buckner's counseling and support as helping them to prepare for this relationship and coaching them through the process. Being completely open with one another from the very beginning helped create trust, Lindsey said, even through the most difficult times ahead.

"The most challenging part was the emotional stuff," Lindsey said. "The placement ceremony was yucky, horrible."

Both families had to work through their grief and guilt, which is a natural part of the adoption story. But steady communication and openness prevailed. The families agreed upon twice monthly visits for the first six months, with monthly visits each month after that.

But it was only nine days after Taylor was born when Lindsey came to stay the weekend with the Neimers.

"My parents were going out of town, so I spent the weekend with them," Lindsey said. "They were like an older brother and sister to me, but the fact that they offered to let me stay with them demonstrates so much. They didn't want me to be all alone emotionally."

"We tried really hard," Shelley added. "I wanted to make Lindsey better, to fix her heart. That's one reason we tried so hard in the beginning. And we wanted to be good role models for her, and to show her that we loved her for who she was – not just because she was Taylor's birth mom."

Settling In

Today, Lindsey works as a marketing supervisor in Denton, Texas. In May 2007, she married Frank Rattan. Taylor, now 8-years-old, was a flower girl in her wedding.

"I can hardly put in to words what it meant to have Tay standing there beside me on my special day," Lindsey said. "Honestly, I had dreamt of it since she was born. I felt so proud knowing that she was there to support me. I know it sounds crazy ... a then 7-year-old supporting me. But I honestly felt that she was proud of her Lindsey."

With future children an imminent possibility for Lindsey and Frank, these families have no hesitation as to where everyone fits.

"Lindsey's like the cool aunt," Shelley said. "She's the one who brings toys and love and fun. I know her children are going to be an important part of our kids' lives, like their cousins."

And Shelley can't wait for her new title, as well: Auntie Shelley. "I know I'm going to be calling her every day for advice,"



Lindsey said. "I've learned a lot about parenting from watching Shelley and Brad. They've really been role models for me on every level – kids, marriage, school and education."

When Lindsey went to Baylor University, the Neimers lived only 10 minutes away. In that time, the Neimers also adopted Will, now 5, through Buckner. The family now hosts an annual birth family Christmas where members from all families come to celebrate the two things that keep them glued together: their children and Christ.

"We've worked hard on our relationship," Shelley said. "But remember, it's always a two-way street. I can only try so much and she can only try so much. If we don't meet in the middle, then it's not a relationship."

"I've always respected them for who they are," Lindsey said. "They're Mommy and Daddy. And I know who I am, too. I'm the birth mom. I'm Lindsey. Or as Taylor and Will say, 'My Lindsey.'"

For more information about open adoption, contact Buckner Adoption at 1-866-236-7823 or www.beafamily.org.



Buckner Receives Hague Accreditation What Does it Mean?

By Debbie Wynne
Director, Buckner Adoption and Maternity Services

On Feb. 29, after years of hard work on behalf of the U.S. Department of State, government agencies, Congress, and the adoption community, the list of Hague accredited adoption service providers was announced. Buckner is pleased to be a part of the first agencies to receive this accreditation.

Hague Accreditation establishes safeguards to ensure intercountry adoption occurs in the best interest of children and families with the highest of integrity and ethics in practice. It is expected that The Hague will be in full force by April 2008.

Prospective adoptive parents who hope to adopt a child from another Hague country will need to be sure they select a placing agency or Primary Provider who is either Hague Accredited or a Supervised Provider. Adoptions with non-Hague countries will continue with no changes.

As a Director of a newly Hague accredited adoption service provider, it is exciting to see U.S. history being made. Not only will families be able to have greater confidence in how they are joined with their child through adoption, but also other countries will be able to see America's commitment on a global level for providing protection and best practice in adoption of the world's children.

The U.S. ratification of the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and The Intercountry Adoption Act is a milestone 14 years in the making.

The U.S. signing of the Hague Convention of Children's Rights in 1994 was the first step in the United States agreeing to establish a central authority in our government – the U.S. Department of State – to create a framework of cooperation between other Hague countries to ensure intercountry adoptions would be in the best interest of children by overseeing intercountry adoption practices. More than 60 countries have signed on to be Hague-accredited countries.

The basic premises that all Hague countries agree to include:

- Every child has the right to a permanent family, even when that family is in another country.
- Adoption of children between countries should take place based upon agreed procedures with the highest of ethics.

The signing of the Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000 set forth U.S. regulations that adoption agencies would have to follow for intercountry adoption practice.

In 2007, the U.S. Department of State selected the accrediting bodies to oversee Hague Accreditation of U.S. adoption service providers: The Council on Accreditation and the State of Colorado. It is the responsibility of these groups to assess and monitor adoption providers to ensure they uphold the highest of standards for intercountry adoption programs.

In 2007, Buckner went through a rigorous evaluation process on our intercountry adoption practice in order to receive Hague accreditation. We updated our policies and procedures to ensure we met Hague requirements and then were evaluated during a multi-step process through record reviews, audits, and interviews by the Council on Accreditation.

A Permanent Home

In Reyna and Daniel's world, there were no bugs, no guinea pigs and definitely no horses.

What they knew was a strict schedule: bunk beds with several children to a room and night lights that went across the edge of the floor like fire flies in the dark. There were no permanent moms or dads. There was only the hope of them.

One day, someone pulled Reyna, 7 and Daniel, 8, aside to tell them that a family wanted to take them home, forever.

"They were given this album with pictures of us and all the animals," said Chris McKlein, their mother of three years, lifting up the book. "One week later, they moved in."

The children had been in the foster care system for two years and moved from house to house so often that it took them a while to understand the concept of a permanent home.

"We lived in three houses before this," Daniel said, raising his arms in the air. "It was hard to go, go, go, drive and go, go go. ... I was scared at first. We had never slept alone in a dark room. And I thought we (Reyna and I) would have to move again, but they kept telling us we'd stay until we grew up."

Reyna was scared, too.

"She was afraid of the dogs," said Dan Bray, her father. "Now she'll run up to them and play with them."

The family lives in a house off a gravel road, with four horses, a guinea pig, three fish aquariums, a frog, chickens and so many cats and dogs it's hard to keep track of them all.

"(The children) didn't know you could run barefoot," Chris said.

**Story and Photography
by Analiz González**

"Now I'll come home and Dan has them working on the roof or riding on the horses and doing things they never would have done.

"I think the adjustment was greater for us than for the kids," she added. "You have two kids suddenly. We had a week from the time we met them to the time they came to our house. We were shell shocked. We had been waiting for months and then it was all finalized suddenly.

"I took their schedule and worked on teaching the kids what to do and what not to do. They didn't know what leftovers were, or Tupperware. And they didn't know you could make chocolate milk because when you're feeding a bunch of kids, any chocolate milk will be coming from a bottle. We also had to explain what TV shows were and commercials."

But Dan said the children were ready to move in with them from the beginning. "We were introduced to them as mommy and daddy and that's what we were."

The Bray-McKlein family isn't perfect, but they tried to reach perfection before allowing themselves to adopt, Chris said.

The couple had been married for 15 years before they started looking into adoption because they wanted the perfect house, perfect health and all bills paid off. But they learned perfection wasn't obtainable and decided to begin the process anyway.

They started with a small adoption agency that ended up folding before they turned to Buckner.

"Buckner had so many more resources," McKlein said. "We got a lot of personalized attention. We ended up with Buckner through a referral and it was so much more than we expected. Even though it's a large agency, it's very personal."

Bray and McKlein informed Buckner that they were open to adopting children of any racial background. Reyna and Daniel are Hispanic.

"In some situations, adopting across racial lines can be hard if the community wouldn't be willing to accept the child," McKlein said. "Adoption isn't just for you. It's about the impact it has on your child. But it's never been an issue for us. We never got negative comments."

Chris said they don't talk to their children a lot about race. "The question is, 'Do you want to introduce that concept when they are colorblind. I mean, I see good and bad points of both.'"

Despite the difference in heritage, the children are as much Bray's and McKlein's as they can be.

"They are ours," Dan said. "We have quirky things that we do and then they pick up on it and you say, 'That's me.'"



Discovering the outdoors.

Reyna and Daniel used to be city kids. When they were adopted into the Bray-McKlein's home after spending two years in the foster care system, they had never seen so many animals. "They didn't even know you could run barefoot," Chris said.



A Picture of Family

Lili wore pig tails with a tiny pink pom pom on one side of her head. In a small purse, she carried every picture, every note her family had mailed her.

Mike and Melissa Adkins waited for months and traveled halfway around the world for this moment. She was beautiful.

She was the most beautiful little girl Mike had ever seen.

He wanted to bury his face in his hands, but instead, he grabbed his camera and snapped a picture as the next scene played out through the lens.

His wife Melissa walked up to LiLi with a big smile and pressed her hand against her heart. "I am going to be your mother."

Melissa had always known that she would adopt. She knew before she ever met her husband. When she did meet Mike, and he agreed to share her dream, they decided that one day they would bring home a little girl and name her Lily.

It was a few months after they decided to adopt internationally through Buckner that Melissa found a message in her inbox. One little girl from China with special needs was waiting for a family. Her name was Chinese, but the pronunciation was the same: LiLi.

"I yelled for Mike and Eston (our son) to come in," Melissa said. "We knew from the beginning that we were going to adopt a special needs kid, but we didn't know what type of ailment it would be. When we were notified about a girl named LiLi with hepatitis-B, I knew that it was her."

As soon as they learned about LiLi's ailment, the Adkins began researching a disease that they were told could lead to premature death. "They tell us its incurable, but we don't buy it. It is all internal and there are no symptoms."

On Feb. 12, 2007 Buckner told the Adkins that LiLi would be their daughter. But while they celebrated the news in Texas, LiLi was living in a Chinese foster home where she had grown attached to her caregiver. So when LiLi was first placed into the Adkins family, the adjustment was hard.

"As she grieved for her (foster) mom, she bonded with me," Melissa said, recalling their first few days together. "We'd get pictures of her foster mom and kiss her and she would cry. Sometimes she'd lock her hands around my neck and just look deep into my eyes."

It's only been six months since LiLi moved in with the Adkins, but already her English is clear and she's forgotten all the Mandarin she

knew. When Melissa or Mike call home and one of their children answers the phone, they can't tell if it's their 7-year-old son Eston or LiLi.

Eston and LiLi are buddies. They whisper in each other's ears and play together. They have the same circle of friends.

"It was hard to believe that we were flying to China and would come back with someone else," Eston said. "But it was fun to think that I was going to have a sister."

Before LiLi, Melissa said she spent a lot of time talking to Eston about a new sister. "We did everything we could to prepare. So he never felt jealous."

Mike said they taught Eston to come to them about his feelings and express what he was thinking.

"When it comes to adoption, kids can take offense to that," he said. "As parents, we can give them tools to help them step outside their selfishness."

Eston was always gentle with his sister, even when she was rough, because they prepared him for it, Mike said. It was strange for LiLi, they said, because she had a foster brother in China who was mean. At first, she would always watch Eston out of the corner of her eye and defend herself from him even when there was no need. Now the two are inseparable, sharing toys and friends.

"It's like we've had her from the beginning," Mike said. "We'd prepared for her for so long."

Melissa added that adopting LiLi was like "having a bond with someone you've never met. It's a different kind of birth and it shows who Christ is."

Story by Analiz González

Photography by

Jenny Pope



Picture perfect.

Playing on the swing and jumping off the haystack is all part of a day's work for Mike Adkins and his daughter LiLi. After living with the Adkins for six months, LiLi – adopted from China – seems like she's been with them from the beginning.



Foster Care and Adoption Knits Family Together

They keep each baby's picture on their refrigerator like family photos on a mantle – innocent faces lined up in the order of their arrival to the home. Mark and Jacquie Craggett go through the photos and call each child by name: Raquelle, Anthony, Nathan, Desi, William, Maya, Hayden, Peanut, Brian.

Story and Photography by Jenny Pope

"Some of these babies were only with us a for a few weeks, but we feel like they've always been with us," Jacquie said.

Technically, two of them have. Nathan and William's smiling faces stare back at Mark and Jacquie from both the refrigerator door and the armchair across the room. Only one version – the version in the chair – is much older. The two brothers, now ages 6 and 7, were adopted after being fostered by the Craggetts since they were just a few days old.

"We had always been open to adopting, but that was never something we thought about when we decided to foster," Jacquie explained. The couple became licensed foster parents after their oldest daughter, Courtney, developed a passion for serving orphans at age 13. It didn't take long for the family to follow suit.

"Our main priority was to protect babies and love them," she continued. "We were open to adoption, but our goal and desire was always for the mom to get her life together and get the babies back with their family."

But when Nathan came into their home at 4 days old, and the family had the opportunity to name him, Jacquie had a feeling things might change.

"I would get up in the middle of the night to feed him or change him and I would see his little face and wonder, 'Maybe he's the one.' I bonded with him immediately," she said.

Having been exposed to drugs and alcohol as an infant, Nathan was immediately placed into the state's care after he was born. His mother's rights were terminated a few months later. With no other family available to take him, the Craggetts were asked if they were interested in adopting him.

"I had been reluctant to start thinking of him as our son until we knew for sure it was a possibility," Jacquie said. "But when we found out, it was a one-second transition for me. We were ready."

The Craggetts were in the process of adoption when they received another phone call from Child Protective Services. Nathan's mother was trying to have an abortion.

"We sat down immediately that day, all of us, and started praying that she wouldn't abort the child," Jacquie remembered. A few months later, one of her daughters asked her when "Lydia" was going to be born.

"I had forgotten all about it, but they were convinced that Nathan's birth mom was going to have a girl and her name would be Lydia," she said. It wasn't too long afterwards that they received another call – the baby had been born, but with drugs in his system. Child Protective Services asked if the Craggetts could take the boy, named William, into their home. But they were hesitant because of what the placement might imply.

Being a Mom.

Jacquie Craggett has raised four daughters, two sons and countless infants as a foster parent. How does she do it? With God's help, she said. "It has really strengthened our understanding of who God is."



"William was the first child we were taking in with the intention to adopt," she said. "Knowing that it might not work out and we would have to say goodbye was really scary." After a couple of weeks of prayer and discussion, they decided to trust God and take the risk. He was meant to be with them.

Jacquie took William to weekly visits with his birth mother as she went through the steps to rehabilitate herself: parenting classes, Narcotics Anonymous meetings and counseling. She followed through on her plan and after 10 months, William was placed back into her custody.

"Giving back William was one of the hardest things we ever had to do," Kelsey, 17, said. "It was so, so, so hard."

Unable to take another child into their home, the Craggetts spent some time grieving William's absence and praying for his mother.

"We prayed for her to do well and for her to be a good mom to William," Mark said. "She did everything right. She was moving in the right direction. We wanted what was best for her and William."

Eight months after William was placed back with his birth mother, she relapsed. William was taken back in the state's care and needed a home. This time, when the Craggetts received a phone call from CPS to take William in, they knew it would be for good.

Though both boys were exposed to drugs and alcohol and dealt

with developmental and sensory issues as infants, they have been "blessed with a sharp mind."

"We are all grateful that their issues are so minor," Jacquie said. "Our biggest issue is that we now have two boys, 10 months apart, and we're in our 50s." She laughed.

Having raised four tame girls, caring for wrestling boys has been a challenging change of pace. But the Craggetts relish the positive impact foster care and adoption has made in their family.

"God has really used the boys in all our lives, taking us to new places in our understanding of His sovereignty and love for us," Jacquie said. "God has chosen to take these little boys and redeem them, the way He redeems all of us. It has really strengthened our understanding of who God is."

"Fostering has helped our daughters to see the darker side of life and the outcomes of making poor decisions," Mark said. "You never want to shield your children too much from problems. I know that our girls, when they go through grief in the future, they will be better equipped."

"Fostering has really knitted our family together."

Though Jacquie admits fostering is not for everyone, she thinks everyone should understand that "serving God is. There are a lot of places to serve, but if God has called you to be a foster family, don't be afraid. God is in control. God has a purpose. God is good."





A loving gift.
Natasha gives her foster mom Ellinor Nixon a special hug. Nixon is petitioning the state to allow Natasha, 22, to live with her as long as she needs.

More than Words

When Ellinor Nixon sees a clean room, she sees more than dust-free floors and neatly made beds. She sees inside a child's mind.

"If a child's bedroom is all jumbled up and messy, it looks like their mind," she said. "But when I see a child cleaning, organizing their rooms, they're being healed. They're going through the healing process."

And Nixon would know. After serving as a foster parent for children with special needs and mental handicaps for more than 17 years in Beaumont, Nixon has developed a certain knack for understanding children without ever saying a word.

"I observe them and take my time to get to know each child," she said. "It's my God-given talent – it's my ministry. I can sense things. And I've learned a lot over the years. It's not an easy job to change a whole person."

But Ellinor is the best person to try, said Mary Budke. She and her husband Henry placed their son Mason, now 16, in the state's hands when they had reached their limit in caring for his severe autism.

At 12 years old, Mason was unable to care for himself at all. He wasn't potty trained and he couldn't speak. But after being placed with

Nixon, Mason's "other mom," he was toilet trained and communicating better than ever before.

"We are so happy that he is here with Ellinor," Mary said. "We couldn't be more blessed. She has a strong spirit and special skills. She was able to do what we couldn't do in 12 years in just two weeks."

Though Mason still lacks verbal communication skills, often communicating with signs and "looks," Nixon can understand every word he says. And he always obeys her requests.

"For years people had been forcing him to do things without asking his opinion, without talking to him like a normal person. So one day, I just told him, 'Mason, take your medicine.' And he took it. He understood. Nobody had ever talked to him like that before."

The Budkes, who live in Silsbee, Texas, frequently visit their son and relish in his changes and growth under Ellinor's roof.

"We had a really rough time with Mason," his father Henry said. "There's some guilt involved anytime you can't care for your child. But when I go to sleep at night, I know that he's safe. And more than that, I know that he's loved."

Story by Jenny Pope
Photography by Analiz González

Nixon treats the Budkes as part of her family, she said. "Any decision I make working with Mason, they support it. It's so cool that we can interact the way we do. We have a spiritual connection."

Nixon works part time as a specialist with the Mental Health Mental Retardation (MHMR) community, training members for job readiness. Her experience working with the mentally handicapped catapulted her into fostering 17 years ago when a certain child needed a home.

Since then Nixon has cared for "40-50 children," she said, with as many as 10-12 living with her at one time. "All special needs – most with mental health issues. I usually take the ones nobody else wants."

Today Nixon cares for Mason and two others – Ruby, 16, and Natasha, 22 – in her two-story bayou home.

"Ruby came to me with some serious mental health issues," Nixon said. "She was shy and withdrawn – she even had a hard time answering the telephone. It seemed like everyone else had given up on her."

Now, as Ruby sorts through her CDs and finishes folding her laundry, she seems like any typical teenage girl. She's an honor student at Central High School and sings solos in the church choir.

"She's very competitive and works hard at school. She doesn't want to be left behind," Nixon said.

Ruby takes some regular classes, along with special education classes. And Nixon has high hopes for her future.

"Ruby's gonna go to college," she said.

Twenty-two-year-old Natasha has Down's syndrome. Nixon has been caring for her for the last four years. This year, Natasha will graduate high school and attend the senior prom. She attends a high level life skills program and receives two hours of special training each day with Gayle Phillips, Nixon's daughter.

Phillips also works full-time with MHMR community and helps Natasha

learn life skills, such as calling 911 in emergencies, identifying her name on medications and knowing how to react in case of a fire.

"I admire my mom," Phillips said. "She's taught me to be consistent and to never give up on a child. I admire that she's so strong and the way she loves children. She just likes helping people, trying to turn them around. It's her gift. It's just her."

Nixon is currently working towards an appeal to the state to keep Natasha in her home, even though she has passed the legal age limit for foster care at 22. When the law passes, it will set a precedent for future foster families to keep special needs children under their roof as long as necessary for a child to function in the world.

This means Natasha, the girl who loves to hug, can remain safe and loved in Nixon's family for as long as she needs.

"I'm committed to help her," Nixon said.

Nixon has received several awards for her work with children, including the Outreach Foster Parent of the Year award from Buckner Children and Family Services in Southeast Texas and the Person of the Week award from ABC-affiliate KBMT Channel 12 in Beaumont.

"Sometimes it feels like I'm not that person," she said about receiving so many awards. "I don't take it lightly, but it doesn't change my spirit. I'm still the same person. The awards are just another one of God's blessings."

People might confuse a woman as giving, as hopeful, as Nixon with someone they could never be – someone they could never understand. But really, she's quite simple. She just follows God's lead.

"God is in the midst of this," she continued. "In all these years, I've never had to take a nerve pill. I don't drink and I don't smoke. If that's not enough proof, I don't know what is!" she laughed.

"This is my gift and I enjoy it. It's not a job. If it gets to be a job, I won't do it anymore. But it keeps me going, keeps me motivated. I couldn't do any of it without God."



COMMUNICATION STYLE (TOP) Ellinor Nixon talks with Mason's parents, Mary and Henry Budke, who often visit their son to celebrate his accomplishments due to Nixon's gifted care giving. **(MIDDLE)** Nixon helps Ruby, 16, clean her room – something she considers to be part of a child's healing. **(BOTTOM)** Mason, 16, who suffers from severe autism, reads a book with Nixon. The two communicate with signs and "looks."

Right now, a child without
a family hopes and prays
for the day they can be a
part of a loving home.

Is it yours?

Be a Family

Through the Buckner Foster Care and Adoption Network

Why Choose Buckner?

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