

## THERAPEUTIC FOSTER CARE

# Joelle—A Case Study

Being the third baby born to a mother, who was not yet 20 years old, Joelle's life was off to an uncertain start. Her mother knew she could not care for another child, especially since she had just lost her own mother, so she asked a family friend to take the baby, hoping for a loving and nurturing family for her. And for 6 happy years, Joelle felt blessed and loved being raised by her beautiful adoptive mother. But her adoptive mom became ill and the last time Joelle saw her was watching as the ambulance took the body away. She did not understand why the person she loved best in the world had to die and the adults around her did not have the words to explain or emotional strength to give to this little child whose entire world had just exploded. And Joelle exploded as well. She exploded into rage. She hit, kicked, threw, punched and yelled. She pushed people away in trying to understand what had happened and expressed her grief and trauma in the only way she knew how.

Over the next years, she was moved from family to family until DCFS was called because of very harsh physical discipline and she entered foster care. Joelle continued to move through foster homes, all the while becoming more violent, more aggressive and more able to effectively drive people away. Her sense of safety and security was non-existent and her emotional needs unmet. Agitated,

easily frustrated, unable to concentrate and acting like a much younger child, she was a challenge for any parent and yet she longed for a family of her own.

The need for intensive intervention that would allow Joelle to recover from a life filled with loss, grief and trauma was vital to help her develop the skills to connect and thrive. And after a short stay at a residential center, this now 11 year old girl was admitted into LSSI's Therapeutic Foster Care program, an evidence based treatment where children are matched with highly trained Professional Treatment Foster Parents. The Foster Parents and TFC team deliver the intensive individualized intervention focused on developing pro-social behaviors in the home, school, and community and moving each child into the carefully chosen and prepared aftercare home within 6 to 9 months of treatment.

Joelle's foster mother and the team quickly engaged her into the program, setting treatment goals around developing positive social skills and learning to get her needs met in a positive way. Her driving desire to care for others, but inability to care for herself, has been a strong focus of the treatment. Her foster parent anticipates situations where Joelle become irritable or distracted and uses humor and silliness to bring out fun and joy. Joelle loves being silly

with her foster mother and has blossomed under her steady, positive and rewarding nurturance. Joelle continues to love caring for others, particularly younger children and she happily helps her foster mother around the house. She has decided that she wants to be a nurse when she grows up, caring for others and helping the sick, as she tried to help her adoptive mother.

Joelle's graduation from the program is being planned as she continues to make steady and significant progress in the program. But she is missing the biggest piece in making her healing complete, a family of her own. Five years of moves, five years of disruptions and five years of disappointment has not taken the love and longing from this caring girl, whose greatest need is for a forever family to open their arms to embrace her.

*\*Name changed to protect confidentiality*