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ANCHORAGE FAMILY WAITS FOR HELP

Doing their best in a tough situation

Anchorage, Alaska: Alecia and Jeff Todd recently celebrated five years of marriage. Alecia says they are a very good team. The couple has had plenty of opportunity to forge a strong team: they are raising two children, one of whom experiences a complex medical condition, feeling the pinch of the economy, battling with government bureaucracy, and navigating a complex private insurance system.

Their days start early and end late; there never seems to be enough time; and stress is a constant. Every day requires that Alecia and Jeff plan and prepare in advance; otherwise, things tend to spiral out of control. Still, they manage to make time for family outings, camping trips, while working hard to ensure all members of the family are happy, cared for, and loved.

But, Alecia says, "We need help."

Katelyn Todd is eleven years old. She is adventurous, enjoys school, gets excited, and can be moody. She thrives on routine and consistency, enjoys being active, and sometimes stays up too late.

Katelyn experiences a rare chromosomal disorder called Deletion 10q. This disorder affects Katelyn's rate of growth. As a result, she is 3'7" and weighs 48 pounds. She receives nutrition from a g-tube, cannot speak, walks very little, and requires constant supervision. Katelyn can communicate and reads at a sixth grade level.

Jeff is Katelyn's biological father from a previous relationship. Katelyn came to live with Alecia and Jeff three years ago, after Katelyn's biological mother lost medical insurance and was unable to provide the care Katelyn requires. Immediately, Alecia and Jeff began seeking services for Katelyn and turned to The Arc of Anchorage. The Arc provided the family the information and assistance they needed to begin the process of receiving services for Katelyn.

Alecia, home on maternity leave after the birth of their child, cared for Katelyn the first year she lived with them. Shortly after Alecia returned to work, her sister came for a three-month visit and assisted

with Katelyn's care. When Alecia's sister left, the couple realized they needed another 15-20 hours per week of parenting time for Katelyn. There simply was no more time Alecia and Jeff could squeeze out of the week; both must work to provide for their family and Katelyn's medical needs. However, Katelyn was happier and thriving with additional support. Alecia and Jeff began exploring the option of shared foster care.

Under a shared foster care plan, time is divided between two sets of parents. Alecia and Jeff would work with a foster family to develop a plan for Katelyn to spend time in each household. A shared foster care plan is usually a 50/50 split between households; however, the parents develop the plan, so there are many options.

"The Arc of Anchorage is committed to helping families in situations like Jeff and Alecia. We have a program that recruits and trains prospective foster families," says Gwen Lee, Executive Director of The Arc of Anchorage. The problem facing the Todd family and others in their situation is a shortage of foster families for children who experience developmental disabilities or complex medical conditions. These children require a special dedication from the foster family. "There is often additional training needed to properly care for these children," says Lynne Stevens, a nurse with The Arc of Anchorage.

The Arc has a "one-stop shop" for prospective foster families in the form of Emily Cadle, Licensing and Compliance Specialist. "Her job is to assist foster families from first contact through training, placement, and follow-up," says Gwen Lee. The Arc works to make the whole process as easy as possible for families wishing to foster a child.

"We have the tools and expertise to share; we just need families who want to make a difference in the life of a child," Lee says.

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