

## THERAPEUTIC FOSTER CARE Darren—A Case Study

Darren,\* a charming and engaging 9-year-old boy, was referred to LSSI's Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) program in spring 2017 after his then foster family was unable to meet his needs. He had a very rough start on life, born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome to a young mother with developmental disabilities and mental health issues. She tried to care for herself and her baby, but often they found themselves living on the streets. Other times, she placed Darren with a voluntary host family or left him with relatives. Through all these moves, uncertainty and trauma, he became more defiant and his behaviors more difficult to manage as he lagged further and further behind in social skills, self-regulation and struggled in school. In 3rd grade, he became a ward after being abused while living with a relative.

Tantrums, anger, high levels of anxiety, extreme nightmares and aggression were the behaviors that quickly overwhelmed Darren's first foster family as he struggled to adapt to yet another home and make sense of his life. Intensive intervention was needed to help Darren heal from a life of trauma and develop the skills that would help him thrive. He was admitted into Lutheran Social

Services of Illinois' (LSSI) Therapeutic Foster Care program, an evidence-based treatment program where children are matched with highly trained Professional Treatment Foster Parents. The Foster Parents and TFC team deliver intensive individualized intervention focused on developing pro-social behaviors in the home, school, and community and move each child into the carefully chosen and prepared aftercare home within 6 to 9 months of treatment.

Darren's treatment goals involved helping him develop a sense of safety and trust, empathy towards others, learn acceptable social skills and make positive friends, and live cooperatively in the home. Darren, his foster parents, and his TFC team practiced these skills over and over, adding more complexity as he mastered goals and celebrated each positive step. He developed a positive and supportive relationship with his foster parents as they taught, coached, and celebrated his successes. He enjoys showing off his good manners, demonstrating his gentlemanly approach to others, and has made good friends. His natural charm and sweetness have enhanced his ability to advocate for himself, and he has

learned how to ensure that his needs are met in a positive way.

Given the amount of dysfunction in his family of origin, the team needed to look more broadly to find Darren's aftercare home. The team quickly found that family in his original voluntary host family. That family had cared for him as a toddler, loved him deeply, and had remained hopeful they would be reunited with him. Through that family's regular visits, involvement in the Therapeutic Foster Care program, and supporting Darren's healing process, they have committed to be his forever family. Darren has made significant progress in the program and has developed the skills he will need to thrive. As he graduates from Therapeutic Foster Care, they are headed together into adoption court and into a hopeful future for this young boy.

*\*Name changed to protect confidentiality*