

Fostering the Future Podcast - David Alonzo - Adoption Case Manager Transcript

Cat 0:00

This is Cat and I'm here with Jack and today we have a very special guest in the fostering the future studio gave it Alonzo is here with us, who was an adoption Case Manager So David, let me ask you a very serious question what is your favorite drink at Starbucks.

David 0:14

What has the most sugar?

Jack 0:17

Probably something like the caramel ribbon crunch frappacino, Do you like that one?

David 0:23

Yeah, yeah.

Jack 0:24

When I've had teens. That's their favorite drink is the caramel ribbon crunch frappacino,

David 0:29

but you know the smores one is good too. I would go with smores.

Cat 0:34

Sounds delicious.

Jack 0:35

Let me ask you, what was your first experience with foster care like Did you know anybody growing up?

David 0:40

Not that I was aware of. I mean after I became a case manager in like 2015, one of my teachers said they were in foster care growing up. So like I knew someone who was a foster kid I just didn't know.

Cat 0:53

One of your teachers that you'd had as a child?

David 0:56

My sixth grade teacher, I grew up in a real small town, so like everyone just knows each other for life.

Cat 1:02

you know, I think a lot of times you don't know what foster care is so you fail to be able to define it, because I didn't know that I knew people in foster care until I learned about foster care was and then looking back, I'm like, oh, that's what that was, because I in same situation like I had a few people in my life who either had foster kids or went to foster care but I just was like oh that's what they're doing.

Jack 1:26

So if you didn't experience, foster care, growing up in any way, what was it that drove your decision to work as a social worker in child welfare?

David 1:34

I knew I wanted to help people. I just didn't know exactly how. I was a substitute teacher for a year and then I was a real teacher for a year and substitutes are real, I guess, sorry.

Jack 1:48

There's a difference with full time teachers, then you have the experience where you're really getting to know all the kids.

David 1:53

Yeah, and I quickly realize that being in front of 30 kids at once, seven times a day it was not for me. When I left being a teacher, I've got one job at an adult group home. While I was there one of my co workers got a job as a case manager and I looked it up I was like, I can do that.

Jack 2:16

Did you have any idea how difficult or heartbreaking it would be?

David 2:21

No. Not in the slightest. And I got there and it's like, this is a lot of work.

Jack 2:30

That is the biggest understatement that's ever spoken on this podcast,

David 2:35

But at the same time like I do think it better fit my skill set than like being a classroom teacher was because it's like, even though you're overwhelmed constantly, and you're always like in a fire that you have to put out, I don't want to speak in front of 30 people at once. I can figure out how to put out the fire. I can drive around with my kid, if you're willing to put in the time and the effort to do things right in child welfare like yeah you'll be overwhelmed but you can do the job,

Jack 3:05

and you make a huge impact. It's so different because in most fields, the harder you work, the more it benefits you. And in this case the harder you work, the more it benefits others.

David 3:07

It's true and you don't even realize it when you are in the middle of it, but then when you take a step back and it's like, oh, I actually helped those people, can you tell me about your position like what it was and what it entailed, I started off as a regular dependency case manager which you guys have had an episode on that so we don't have to get to and I moved to an adoption case manager I eventually, after a year of that became adoption supervisor at a different agency and adoption case manager in terms of the work you're doing a lot of the same work as a dependency case manager but you're also, and it's different with different agencies sometimes you're the primary case manager sometimes you're the secondary case manager, but you're also doing all the adoptions where to get kids adopted, if they're already in an adoptive placement, you're doing the home study which is more in depth than a placement home study, you're doing a CHILD Study, which is like a really in depth, everything about the child from their parents histories to their histories to all their mental health stuff their medical stuff just a really in depth look at the kid, if your kids aren't matched, you are doing maths meetings, you're doing the referrals to get the kids on websites like the art gallery, to try to get kids match, you're going to match events, you are, there's a lot, there's a lot.

Jack 4:39

It sounds like two jobs.

David 4:41

It is.

Jack 4:42

It's a pretty overwhelming job to always stay on top to swing around with them in the court case and all that, But then also, you're an adoption worker,

David 4:49

Yep and you're going to all the court hearings, depending on the agency you're writing all the judicial review reports in mostly adoption case managers are usually they're experienced, so it's, it's not a promotion, it's more of a lateral move but it's kind of a promotion, you generally don't go straight into adoption case management you generally start as a case manager though Yeah, usually you're it's certified people who are, who have experience and they know what they're doing. Yeah, I don't know if I've met anyone that's come right out of training in

Jack 5:19

The adoption case managers I've worked with were, case managers before.

David 5:23

It's like a case manager, but you're doing a lot more paperwork.

Cat 5:28

But you're not working with biological parents

David 5:30

No

Jack 5:30

what has to happen for a child to get to the point that they're available for adoption that they're being brought to you as a case.

David 5:38

so usually we wouldn't get a case, after the parents rights were terminated, or if there's a missing parent they do a diligent search, they get back what's called a putative father registry, saying there is no father for this child. They published for the child like, where's the Father on this one, and then they're able to terminate a missing parent, but after the parents rights are terminated, and then they have what's called an MBI hearing a manifest best interest and said, it's in the best interest of this child to be free for adoption. The judgment is done for adoption, then the adoptions worker can start doing the adoptions work, so an MBI takes place after TPR happens. Okay, sometimes TPR will happen, and they don't see the kids for adoption. That's rare. I don't think I've ever been on a case that's been like that, but no it's, it's after TPR,

Cat 6:27

most people don't know about things like manifest best interests or the judge making a

child legally free for adoption, is that correct?

David 6:33

I think so. I don't think that's common,

Jack 6:35

yeah. I've never heard of that.

Cat 6:37

Can you kind of walk us through the process of what happens from termination of parental rights through an option day

David 6:43

okay so parents rights get terminated, you wait, an appeal period, which I believe is 30 days after. If there's no appeal, then we can start actually trying to get the child adopted is there in a placement, that's already in adoptive placement, we do our child study, we do our adoption home study and even if you know you're a placement so you've had a home study already, you have to do another adoption home study

Jack 7:11

is definitely more intense I remember having one where I just feel like, oh my gosh, she just like rip my insides out and like, basically we had this session where we talked about every devastating thing that's ever happened in my life, and I felt exhausted, that he added to that whereas I've had, you know, I've had a million home studies by now between adoptions and being a foster parent so it's definitely more in depth,

David 7:31

you definitely get probed the backgrounds are more in depth too, so you have to wait for adoption backgrounds to come back, one that is that we do what's called disclosure. Once you're approved, which is we go over the child study with you, you then make a decision. If you want to adopt, we usually make people wait a few days, even if we know they're gonna say yes, like in the moment, everyone's gonna say yes. So once you say yes after a few days, we give you an adoption packet which has some resources, a list of attorneys that adoption attorneys, we're not allowed to tell you which adoption attorney is, I guess it's would show favoritism or something. And there's some great attorneys, we have to do subsidy paperwork, which is adoption assistance agreement saying like you're agreeing to this much subsidy for the child that's another thing people outside of the child welfare system don't know is that adoption from the child welfare system is free and you know the adoption subsidy,

Jack 8:31

I think a lot of people, when they look at adoption as an option, one of the barriers there is they're like it's so expensive. Not only are all of your expenses covered from foster care, they you will continue to receive a stipend, if you were the foster parent you will continue to receive a stipend, if you were not the foster parent if you're a different person adopting the child, there will be a reimbursement, what is it called a statement or what is it called, yeah. So savings, help cover the cost that you will incur in taking care of the child is not anything crazy great you know it's not going to cover all of the child's expenses but it definitely offsets that in addition they also get their health care, cover, and also

David 9:11

their colleges paid for and colleges paid for. That's a conversation I've had with so many people outside of work, who it was a barrier they want to adopt but they're like it's gonna cost me 10s of 1000s of dollars, it says that it does. But they don't understand like no if you adopt a kid out of the foster care system, then it's not going to cost you any money. Yeah, legal fees

Jack 9:36

for the lawyer know the list of lawyers that you were mentioning, are the ones that will build the state directly. Yeah, there's no cost involved in that, obviously that's the cost of raising a child but if you're looking to parent then that's going to come anyways and it sure is nice not to have to worry about that college we don't go for your kids come from foster care, and I the kids until they're like 28 years old. And it's a couple years ago so yeah I think you're right, that's 28 years old.

David 10:04

People should adopt from the foster care system. So after we agree on the subsidy, you sign another packet of paperwork, we give that to the attorney is called the disclosure packet, he attorney takes that they're like, this is good, then they go to the judge, try to get a court date they set a court date, and then that's when the adoptions finalized

Cat 10:23

our adoptive parents found or chosen, if there's more than one

David 10:27

option, we want to go with family first, so we look for family, a lot of times if a kid is in a placement with a grandma or aunt or uncle or even adoptions with older brothers and sisters, then that's what we want to go with, if we don't have family we look for non

relatives, which could be a foster parent who already has a child, if we don't have any non relatives, we recruit, so that entails like trying to get the kids on websites like the Heart Gallery, let's say, two people want the same set of kids, there's a lot of thought goes into that like we want to keep siblings together, we'll try to go to a placement that wants to adopt older siblings. If there's no one more to find after they get on the recruitment website, people will see the child, and they'll enquire, sometimes they already have home studies completed by private agencies, those tend to go first because like we have something to read, we'll get all the home studies we narrow it down, and then we try to start match meetings, so a match meeting is, we will have a committee will have multiple families in that day, and the committee consists of, have you guys discussed on this podcast. I think we mentioned it said not and so we can get more in depth in the arc to our is called adoption application review committee, and that's if, if there's something on a potential adoptive parents background that's like questionable or is like a disqualifier, and it's just like this is not like something that NSA like we can, you can't adopt forever, but it's something like we need to review this. So we set up a meeting, the adoption case manager goes out, they do like an interview with the person they fill out this questionnaire, they type up a report, they submit it to the lead agency in rounds of committee. The committee is made up of the one person from the lead agency who's running the meeting. And then, third parties that work in the child welfare system but they don't work on this case. So like someone from the guardian ad litem usually there's a therapist, someone from DCF, and then, case managers there your adoption case managers there the therapist is there, just anyone who's involved with the cases there, and then the purse, the potential adoptive placement is there and they, they ask about this person's history, and it's like, okay, these things happen in your background, and sometimes it's like a drug charge from 30 years ago, but sometimes it's like, okay, you've had, like, 18 calls to your home for like inadequate supervision, and we go over each one, and it's really a horrible experience for the potential adoptive placement because it's just like you're really grilling me you're going over all these things in my life a lot of which they probably want to forget, we had a class this poor guy, he had gone to prison for a year, years and years prior, and he raised his grandson probably from the day he was born. And we, unlike he wasn't great in the Arcana real life. Okay, let's do another one. In the judges like really getting mad at us and she's like we know what the issues are, you need to fix this and come to some conclusion because the ark, staffing, they don't have to end in, like, yes or no, they shouldn't end and like we need more information, and then we'll have another staffing, it was off out the process, months and months and months.

Jack 14:04

Did you have to work with everybody's schedule.

David 14:05

So this poor guy is. He's like saying that right, why can't I just dust my grants. Eventually he did, but then like if they don't do well in your interview, as the professionals, you have to be like, I have to make sure this child safe, but like if we say no we're dragging this process out and this kid is not getting permanency that they need, when he's been

Jack 14:28

alive yeah

David 14:29

sure he's not moving around, he's not going to different homes with a lot of foster kids but like the caseworker coming all the time like, that's stressful on a family and

Jack 14:39

we have talked about that a lot you had talked to me when we adopted baby charges. When we got baby Jack he was 10 days old, and he had one visit, over the course of two and a half years before he was adopted, it took a really long time to get through to the TPR process, because we kept getting new case managers and every time we got a new case manager was like, Alright, we're going to do this we're going to get this kid home and it's like, you know, in those types of situations where there's no engagement from the parents and also if you've taken a look at the history, you would know that reunification was not really ever be possible, you know, while he was with us the whole time so he's been with us pretty much his whole life, those first two and a half years or so much stress because there was always like, is he gonna leave tomorrow is something gonna happen is a relative going to pump up to not have that permanency for him and for us was stress, and for us to have that stress as young as he was, he definitely felt the stress, you know, and our whole family was my son over here kept saying he was gonna learn Canadian so that if we had to run away to Canada with his brother, until a family reaches permanency regardless of the stability of the placement, the anxiety that's involved is a lot for everybody involved.

Cat 15:51

I'm super interested in like genetic genealogy, you know like the 23andme stuff, because I listened to a lot of true crime podcasts. Jack daddy so we share them but I've always, I've been wondering for like the last year and a half, how things would be different in child welfare, if they would use genetic genealogy on these kids not just because it would bring potential fathers to the surface. I don't know that it would ever bring like viable relatives to like that could be placement but yeah I do wonder about like other kids who have other siblings in care,

Cat 16:24

a mother can gestate a pregnancy for nine months she can never name the father she can never tell the father, but we have potential tools at our disposal to find, you know, potential relatives or fathers and so I have wondered if that could help some of these cases, you know, not just for like relatives and Health Studies, I don't know that it actually would help but just to like broaden the spectrum of opportunities for relatives for these kids.

David 16:50

I think that's a great idea because, especially like if you have an older sibling, I have had cases where like a dad or papa on like five different cases, the world is small, there's a lot of relationships that people find out they're like, Oh my gosh. I'll take this kid right away. Yeah. So yeah, especially if you're a much older sibling, like we've explored people I was, I have a brother.

Cat 17:17

Totally. This year, a year and a half ago, we found out we had another brother on 23andme. And it's like, it's like you grieve that you've lost someone. All those years, and I would be shocked if like half the kids in foster care are in a similar situation, of course,

David 17:34

of course, and as you said when you found out as an adult, you creamed. It has to be horrible, but then I mean, was there any kind of afterward, like, oh my gosh, I want to make the connection, or

Cat 17:49

we have a connection now and we have a developing relationship but we have lost 32 years. Wow, and so it's not lost on any of us because now there's four of us that we've lost all these years together in that there were adults who kept us apart.

David 18:05

Which is why, as the adoption workers, at least in my mind like our biggest thing is like we need to keep siblings together.

Cat 18:12

Yeah, I totally am on board with that and a lot of times when, when I hear people talk about like, no after the adoption, it's just, I just don't feel like it's in their best interest to keep these visits going I mean, you know, and I often think that like how resentful that child will might be as an adult, realizing that the parental figure made that decision for them to take away their biological

David 18:38

sibling, I've even been to adoptions where on adoption day, it wasn't a joyful experience for me because it's like we did a separate his sibling staffing, which we can talk about those, they decided these kids need to be separated. I said no. I was my recommendation at the staffing like they need to all be together. And then the one family life one kid get adopted first, they made this huge deal about an idea that you're adopting a child and, but your sister's there and she's not getting adopted that says horrible

Jack 19:11

experience with a kiddo that came to me that was supposed to be just for a night and stayed a bit longer, he had basically been in care since he was four years old, I think he was 11 at the time, all of his siblings had been adopted except for him. One by one, and he had watched it happen, and it was devastating for him, especially because he had gone through many disruptive, adoptive placements, I mean first of all to go from four to 11, being in foster care system. No wonder he had disrupted adoptive placements, but to be removed from his siblings and watching them get adopted one by one, and being the last one chosen there's got to be very difficult.

Cat 19:48

Well, that leads me to our next question which is can you tell us about your worst day your hardest day,

David 19:55

any art staffing was a really hard day, because I felt bad for the prospective adoptive parents, even though we needed to have that staffing and even though sometimes like we do that, staffing, and we're like this person can adopt these gifts that actually probably made it harder when you're like, we have to use a different direction. I'm sorry. There are adoptions that fall through

Jack 20:20

disrupted adoptions. I feel like most of the time, disrupted adoptions happen because people don't have appropriate expectations or understanding of kids who have had trauma, you're completely right. So we've talked about, actually I was just re listening to one of our first podcasts, and one of the things we talked about was going into foster care, with the sole intent to adopt is not a great idea because the purpose of foster care is to reunify, and if your intent is to adopt, then your thought process and your mind frame is not going to be one that is going to be encouraging and supportive of the parents, the family unit and that reunification and as positive as you can be, and like everybody's gonna

be able to feel how you really feel you know, and and it can be heartbreaking because, you know, not every kid is going to be adoptable, and you can't look at a placement like this is going to be the kid I adopt if they're not TPR yet, adoption disruptions, I feel like are one of the biggest problems that we've got to find a solution for me because every time a kid's adoption is disrupted, man it wrecks them and it makes them that much harder to trust someone else. Right,

David 21:26

well no, we have kids, we I kids under me that they've been disrupted, so many times, they don't want to be adopted,

Jack 21:33

no because they, I mean, their first person wasn't able to follow through and parent them to their biological family, and now we've had all these people promising them family and giving up on them.

David 21:45

Yeah and, and I think you were right, it's people have the right expectation going into it, especially people, I agree that foster to adopt is not a great scenario, I don't think people should go into it like that, but when you're a foster parent, you do you have more of an expectation of, especially if you're an experienced foster parent of what traumatized kids are going to be like in someone who is like, I want to adopt, I want to give back so they go on to a recruitment website, they see a picture of a kid, they're like, that's my baby. I just knew the moment I saw their picture and then, you know, sometimes those are great families who pass their home studies, They go to the meetings they say everything right they've done all the research, they get the kid, he braced the stuff in their life, he needs to leave.

Jack 22:39

No matter what you say to someone, they don't get the experience and understand kids smell poop on the wall breaking things is like, I remember a friend of mine was struggling, it was actually that exact situation, she had seen her and her significant other saw him on a Heart Gallery, and they wanted to give back, they wanted to adopt they hadn't hearts for kids who needed homes, they went through the process I mean they're great people, they're a great family, but they didn't know what to expect. I went over there one day because she was about to disrupt and I was like you know what, what can we solve here and the main problem was he was punching the wall and putting holes in the wall, and that was scary because she hadn't, what does that mean like what scares you, but for someone who's been a foster parent for a little while, it's like this isn't a big deal like he just has big

emotions and if you were that age, you might want to put a hole in the wall to let's find a way to outline so I was like, let's get a punching bag for him or some athletic thing he could do in the backyard but in the end it was just too much, you can tell someone over and over, what a traumatized kid looks like and what that's going to look like in your home, when it happens in your home is a crisis, and you're scared anything they're gonna hurt someone or hurt you or find yourself this is what traumatized kids do. And especially when they're about to be adopted by you, they're looking to see that you're going to love them even if they put a hole in the wall,

David 23:57

and guess what, if you're like, I can't handle this when they start putting holes in the wall, they're gonna start putting more holes in the wall because they've been burned so many times they're probably just gonna be like, I need to get out of this. Yeah. And how are they going to get out of it. How are they coming out of it before by going crazy and disrupting placements,

Jack 24:16

they're gonna hurt themselves so they get Baker Acted and once Baker Acted they definitely won't want me. That's true. I just often think even though, like you shouldn't go into foster care to adopt I feel like the people who are going to be most likely to be successful adoption, especially for these kids who've had, you know, trauma is someone who's been a foster parent. I wonder how we extend that to minimize disruptions. Yeah, I feel like a lot of times when you have teens or older kids that need to be adopted, you're immediately, trying to recruit from these websites, but what if you were trying to recruit more from existing foster

David 24:51

parents, there's minds. I like that idea I think it's a great idea. I think we should do that. But when you start doing that, there's also the lines of, we have to do the proper channels of recruitment, so we don't get into a situation where it's like a backdoored option. I think there should be something like that but we will we want to be careful and not a situation

Jack 25:13

than doing normal recruiting to the public,

Unknown Speaker 25:15

somewhere, red is listening to this and like freaking out. Or at least, she's like does like my foster

Jack 25:25

read. Like if there was a way to do it correctly. Do you think that would make less adoptive disrupt mints, because these are people who know what they're getting into.

David 25:35

Yeah I do, I think it would be great. I also think though that like experience foster parents don't always want to adopt.

Cat 25:43

I definitely think it's like safe to say this is a conversation that should go on and that we should continue to think about and talk about because these are really great points, and the scenario, I feel like I could predict it at like word for word, like someone sees child on Heart Gallery, someone says this child was meant to be mine, I feel it in my soul, they go through all the motions, the child gets in their home, they smear poop, they call you and say, sorry, it's too late at night I have to talk to you, I can't do this anymore, and it's

David 26:13

always a surprise to us, even though it happens so often, because we've vetted these people, like we think they're gonna

Jack 26:22

think that it's not good people, I think. I think they just don't get it

David 26:26

until you do it, but in our match staffing is a lot of times we weed out people that were like, this person's not going to be able to handle this. Yeah.

Cat 26:37

When you see some of the most extreme behaviors is during those times of transition those weekend visits and I know that I'm sure you've seen lots of these behaviors but when can even when it's like a fantastic home and they could decided to go, they're like doing crazy things with their excrement, and it's like going on and it's like well I have control over my own body so

Jack 26:59

with shampoo bottle because they make them mad Yeah,

Cat 27:03

like it always seems to be their bodily functions but if you think about it there's like the one

thing they have control over, and it always seems to be the case, unifying or being adopted. It's a very difficult thing for us to go through, Even when it's happy, it is. I've had a teenager go number two in my car. I didn't know till after and also was able to charge like a \$250 fee like we were done,

Jack 27:31

or you know when he returned, fine print.

Cat 27:39

I don't know about poop I just vomit if you open it over, you have to drink too much and take it or just drink a little and taken over, but it was horrible, but it's just like, I felt so bad for that kid.

Jack 27:53

Yeah, It must have been like more

David 27:54

like, because it was on our way to like sexual abuse therapy, say anything to her. I took her home. I went, you know, and then I cleaned my seat but it's like this poor girl. Yeah, you know eventually she got adopted. It was wonderful, but it was so rough and kids do crazy stuff and people who know what they're doing, freak out and disrupt them, and you know this is not an adoption case I had but the worst day I ever had was we placed this kid and he was, he was on the spectrum and he was at high functioning he was pretty much nonverbal, we found him a therapeutic calm, two days and this guy calls and he's like, You need to come get this kid you need to come get this kid he's freaking out, we don't know what to do, call the guy down and you know go through scenarios I choose. Try this. Try this. I'm like, Okay, where are you at, and it's like we're on the side of the road, and I hit there. It is in the car, they locked him in the car. He's beating on the Windows he's taking his shirt off because he's so hot.

Cat 29:06

My gosh. You wonder he was freaking out.

David 29:10

I seen him in my car and find him on try shirt and like, you know, we found him like his wonderful group home after, but like I think about that all the time. It's like you couldn't even get him home. You couldn't drive them to the office, like I know we hate it when people, there's all these stories about people dropping kids, but like, lock them in the car on the side of the road. Use report.

Cat 29:34

Even adults. There's too much Limbo in our lives we definitely dig in our heels, you know, and we were like, stop I have control over my own life I'm gonna, you know, yeah speed on the highway, watch me fully functioning, adults who follow normal rules do things like that

Jack 29:51

of starting to worry about your speeding

Cat 29:55

probably drive too slow, actually, we spend too much money, you know, when we feel like our lives are out of control, we're going to target and I'm going to spend too much money is that more relatable. Yeah, you know, things like that, these kids, some of them have been in limbo, their entire life. And then they're triggered by more limbo, and we start to see their behaviors, and there's nothing that you can do to talk someone out of that like your conscious mind is not able to say like, oh you're totally right, this is a good change, you're still gonna dig in your heels when there's any change,

David 30:26

everyone has it in the training that like traumatized kids, they're always on 100 because they're still in survival mode. In road rage traffic. Yeah, and like I understand how placements feel sometimes because like I run that like 30 If I get any higher or lower, I might freak out, I've been trowel for so long that I stay at 30 while everything's burning around a, but people get kids and the kids at 100 all the time. So the placement like the parent gets to 70 and they're like, I can't handle this, and then they engine blows up which is. Yeah. It's tough, and yeah I think you're right, more foster parents need to adopt, I don't think everyone has the mindset of like I need to adopt more kids, but some foster parents and I've had a great one that I wanted to adopt the kid she had she's I know it's not adopting the kids it's not for me. Foster is we're going to try to reunify, we're going to try to find a forever home for this family. That's a wonderful mindset. Yeah, and some people actually do foster care to do that. Yeah, and that's what your mindset should be when you get into it. I've had one family that got into foster to adopt that I like, and I thought their mindset was good because they had an infant baby, they're like, we're doing foster to adopt but we understand that we're not going to adopt, most of the kids we have,

Jack 31:50

yeah. And you can, so you won't have space anywhere like listen,

David 31:58

you can't, and, and the dad fought the case and it was a non offending dad who was abused himself, and you know he went to 40 got his kid back, he was not offending in the foster bands way. Okay, we understand. I'm not saying I could ever do that. Yeah, that's a mindset that you have to

Jack 32:18

absolutely and the truth of the matter is, like, much less reunifications happen than should. Yeah, so when they do happen, we should be so excited we should praise the heck out of those parents and what they've accomplished because it's not easy, and especially in our area, I feel like maybe it's just been my experience but knowing that we are really the heart of the opioid crisis right now, most cases are drug related, depending on the drug, most drug addicts, don't recover. Yes, certainly not within a year to reunify with their child. The bottom line is, most people who have drug addictions have trauma that led to the drug addiction. Most, have you met any drug addicts that never had any trauma, there's a direct link, but I think that, you know, for someone to recover fully from a drug addiction, generally takes more than a year because first you've got to, you've got to get them to a point, first of all where they're willing to work on the problem and admit that there even is a problem. And then when you get to that point. Okay, can we talk about the trauma that led to that, then I mean really it takes years to work through that trauma, you've got to get them clean, whether that's inpatient or outpatient rehab to really successfully reunify with someone who has a drug addiction, probably should take closer to four or five years, that's not fair to these kids, no right,

David 33:31

no it's not, but sometimes those cases last that long.

Jack 33:35

Yeah. And, or sometimes they are shorter, and then the kid comes back in the care for a second time, or a third time I've seen, so it feels like so rarely are parents able to reunify that when it does happen. That's amazing, like we should get so freakin excited about that, and also as a foster parent like listen, if you want to adopt, chances are you're going to adopt I really I mean I've been asked to adopt, way more kids than I have, you know sometimes it's just like, I don't feel like I'm the parent of that kid. And so if I were to say yes, sure I'm giving that kid a family but she deserves a family that would move mountains to be able to adopt her. You know, she deserves a family or he deserves a family that feels in their heart that they're his parent. And if I were to adopt that child just because we have a bond just because you know I've been their mom for this amount of time that's not fair to them they deserve, way more than that. Every kid deserves to be just like, like you hung the moon, if I were to say yes to every kid that I've been asked to adopt, I mean I wouldn't

be able to foster definitely a situation that a lot of foster parents find themselves in.

David 34:43

So what has been your best day best days, Lots of adoptions my first adoption was on National Adoption Day, and it was the first National Adoption Day that I've been to, so I was like, Okay, I did this work and now it's like, it's a party is so cool when a teenager gets a placement, and then gets adopted. It's like you cry, because most of our teens are, they've been through so much, and they've been through so many placements, and they have behaviors that are light and I had one kid that I had for a long long time as a regular case manager, And he was anchored the arms, his grip on gotcha down, so I would be with him on like him and two other kids that lived there for like two weeks and that like, that was like the toughest two weeks in foster care, because I had three kids that I grew up on the gotcha down and we're trying to find them all placements with them all day every day, so I like that I get yelled at by judges because I'm not doing my work, but they found a traditional home for him, they found a mentor for him who then adopted him. Oh wow, that's crazy. He was 17 he was about to turn 18 And he got adopted the best, the best day ever.

Jack 36:02

What do you think are some basic things that other partners can do to work better with you and make your job easier as an adoption manager

David 36:09

know that we're going to try to put siblings together. Expectations are huge, realizing that everything is, it's a long process to adoption

Jack 36:20

is a friend of mine is. Oh, you know, my foster child is TPR and we're being considered as an adoptive placement. One of the things I always recommend is, get a hold of the adoption packet ASAP because we've all got copies of it as deliver a copy of it, fill it out, email it, do not hand it to anybody, email it, because then you have a record because when it gets lost when there's turnover in case management, you know, and there's a new case manager, all of a sudden, you could just say here's the, oh I don't do everything ASAP so that they're not waiting on you because they have a lot of stuff that they've got to do. So if you have air all of your stuff done, and if you're ever offered National Adoption Day. It usually speeds things up because they have to try and get, like if you agree to National Adoption Day, you will have National Adoption Day, and they will get all of the paperwork done before then, obviously, there's always like the extenuating circumstances like if there's a sibling separation staffing that goes on too long if there's the other things that

can kind of hold things up if you're out of state, or have extra backup jobs. So I feel like turning in your paperwork, emailing it so you have a digital copy and can easily re email it, and just stay on top of everything and always asking what the next thing you can do is I will help your process go quicker,

David 37:33

nope you hit the nail on the head with that one. If you turn everything in, like, the case managers want to get the adoptions done because when they're being pushed to get them done by their bosses and their bosses and their bosses and their bosses and to like adoptions are awesome, three, is another kid off your caseload which, you know, they have 40 kids, things do tend to move faster at National Adoption Day, they also tend to move faster. May in June, because it's the end of the fiscal year. So they're trying to get there,

Jack 38:04

interesting, that was my other two adoptions.

David 38:08

They're trying to meet their goals, which I you know, it shouldn't be like that, but give me a word that you think people would use to describe an adoption case manager, a word that people would use to describe an adoption case manager, one that I would use is experienced, like I said before, these are all experienced case managers, they've been in the system they know what they're doing.

Jack 38:32

What would surprise most people to learn about your role. The

David 38:35

most surprising thing as we touched on before, to learn about our role from the outside of child welfare world, is we're not charging you a bunch of money. We don't make a lot of money. We have a lot of kids that need to be adopted. So we're trying to do that, I think that's the most surprising thing,

Jack 38:56

what is your self care routine to combat trauma fatigue from secondary trauma that we all experienced from working with kids and parents

David 39:02

who've experienced trauma, this is not my best area. I mean I'm not a child welfare anymore. So it's like, I don't feel like I succeeded in that I met my wife, during my child

welfare, when I was single, there wasn't much of a self care routine at all. I worked all the time,

Jack 39:20

I didn't not only feeling depressed and anxious a lot.

David 39:22

Yeah, but also I was like I have anything else to do. Yeah, so I didn't really like I could work a lot, and I did work a lot. It helped me in my career and it helped my cases so self care would be like, I did this song as a, as I grew as a person and a case manager and, you know, as my life went in a direction to where like, Working 5060 however many hours a week is just, it takes away from other things, it's harder in this line of work because, you know, when you're a workaholic here, you're helping people.

Cat

Can you give me a word that you think people would use to describe adoption case manager,

David

a word that people would use to describe an adoption case manager, one that I would use is experienced, like I said before, these are all experienced case managers, they've been in the system they know what they're doing. What would surprise most people to learn about your role. The most surprising thing, as we touched on before, to learn about our role from the outside of child welfare world, is we're not charging you a bunch of money. We don't make a lot of money. And we have a lot of kids that need to be adopted. So we're trying to do that, I think that's the most surprising thing,

Jack

what is your self care routine to combat trauma fatigue from secondary trauma that we all experienced from working with kids and parents

David

who have experienced trauma, it's not my best area. I mean I'm not a child welfare anymore. So it's like, I don't feel like I succeeded in that I met my wife, during my child welfare, when I was single, there wasn't much of a self care routine at all. I worked all the time, I didn't

Jack

know probably feeling depressed and anxious a lot.

David

Yeah, but also was like I have anything else to do. Yeah, so I didn't really like I can work a lot, and I did work a lot, helped me in my career and it helped my cases so self care would be like, I did this home visit. I'm going to move down all the way home. As I grew as a person and a case manager and, you know, as my life went in a direction to where like, working 5060 however many hours a week is just, it takes away from other things, it's harder in this line of work because, you know, when you're a workaholic here, you're helping people.

Jack

Yeah, it feels less selfish, it

David

feels less selfish, and you use as an excuse, I learned, turn your phone off on the weekends, and don't answer it past a certain time behind it, I had a bad, and I was driving over the Howard Franklin Bridge, and this path, called me 41 times back to back to back to back to back to back, while I was on the bridge, the phone. I knew it wasn't an emergency, because he called me 10 times a day every day, and like I talked to him a lot, you have to not answer the phone all the time, as you know, that might sound bad. No, not answering the phone all the time was the biggest self care for me going to the movies, child welfare work is so serious and this is so I like, I'll watch like professional wrestling, because and I don't care because I deal with the horrors of life everyday so I can watch something stupid.

Jack

Yeah, I have something similar not wrestling, but just like really tacky TV shows like reality TV shows that I watched that are like, I'm like, they're so dumb and sometimes it's embarrassing like I'm not going to tell you what they are. Yeah, sometimes you just need something mind numbing. Kind of like recover from the stuff that, like, goes on during the day. Yeah. So what do you think the biggest struggles were that you faced as an adoption case manager,

David

the amounts of paperwork, are like really tough, so it's hard to prioritize doing field stuff and like, coming into adoptions, I was used to the field. So sitting down and like typing in child study or typing the home study like I'll go and do the home studies all day, but then typing them. If someone's missing something, having to ask them for the extra document, which is like, I'm like nonconfrontational to fall. Like, it would be like after like build myself up and be like, You did this wrong. Can you do it again. And that's like the simplest thing

to ask someone, but I think like Susan's gonna yell at me. You still have to do on call, and adoptions, on call, no matter the position in child welfare is always going to be the hardest

Jack

because those are the emergencies, those when you're responding to

David

a crisis, those are the those are the crises, it's not always just a crisis, it's like kids have night to night placements, a lot, we have to pick up the kids in the morning we have to drop them off at night, during the week you get to zero work. So there's times during the weekend as adoption case manager you're trying to get all this stuff down to this field adoptive the hearing has to wait another month, so they don't meet your projection matrix.

All

Jack

right. What do you think the community can do to prevent more kids from needing to come and take care of

David

their neighbors. Yeah, you know, be a community, the Intesa village thing is not just a full save, but it's like when I grew up, my house from a small town but like my neighbor's parents were my parents, if you see someone struggling, help them, like a lot of the people that we get that come into care don't have support systems, if you know, struggling parents, single parents, male or female, either friends help with their kids do them a date night. If you see abuse calling a report of course, so many abuse situations are from, just people can't handle raising kids is hard, yeah, as you know, I don't know, life's hard without a kid.

Jack

Support is huge, having like a community of people that help you makes parenting is easier. It's never easy but it can be easier for sure. and I feel like a lot of people. I don't know if there's our culture, or just the days that we're living in, but people think that they shouldn't get in other people's business.

David

Yeah we are. I think it is our culture where we're really individual culture, like I don't,

Jack

I don't want to impose on them, that's not my business that's their business. Yes,

David

I take care of my business they take care of their business but really that's not conducive to though, it's not. And as you said, like, to get your adoption done faster the squeaky wheel gets the grease, reaching out to people need people to reach out to them.

Jack

Yeah, because when you're in a dark place. You're embarrassed.

David

Yeah you are. It's hard for people to ask for help, and sometimes they don't even know they need help, or know that anybody's willing to help them. Yeah, if you become someone's friend that mentality of, they're judging me goes away. It's like this is my friend, they can help me. And I can help them not being in people's business but like being in people's lives, keeps kids out of care.

Jack

What do you hope to do in your future to help make our community a better place.

David

Man, I, there's so many things that popped in my head, I want to raise my family well, and we want to be in our community and be people that people can reach out to within the community, for meals for support. It also said that's the biggest thing is your household. Yeah, your surrounding area, but in the larger sense, adoption would be great. I don't know if that's in the cards for us right now. Being a guardian ad litem would be great.

Jack

All right, well thank you so much for coming today David, we really appreciate it.