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Fostering Kindness

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Each one has a different reason for being involved, but the roughly 30 members of the adoption club all share the goal of working to help the growing number of children in foster care, promoting adoption as a whole and trying to make it a functional, safe system.

Nearly two years ago, alumna Allison Peters came to Diana Baltimore, lecturer for Human Development and Family Studies at Iowa State, about starting an adoption club on campus.

Baltimore wondered why they had not started something like that before.

Being adopted at birth herself, adopting her daughter, starting a nonprofit about adoption, advising the adoption club on campus and conducting her own research have all led her to wanting adoption to be a public matter and not “hush-hushed.” With Baltimore’s lifelong experience in the area, it made sense for Peters to approach her about starting the club.

“There was a negative stigma with adoption during the time I was born,” Baltimore said. “It wasn’t talked about, and that is what sparked my interest in research [about adoption].”

Since Baltimore has experience with adoption on a personal and professional level, she often helps the board of the club find speakers to come to the meetings who can share their stories or offer career choices to students.

Emily Unkrich, the president of the adoption club, has a soft spot for foster care children.

“When those puppy commercials come on and everyone’s like ‘aww,’ I’m like it’s a dog — there are children out there,” Unkrich said. “People just have things they’re sympathetic for.”

Of course she feels bad for those dogs, but her heart aches for the children in foster homes who are looking for their forever home.

You do not have to be adopted to be in the club. Unkrich was not adopted, but she is one of many interested in a career in the adoption field.

Unkrich is interning at Youth and Shelter Services (YSS) where she checks references for people who want to adopt and does house visits to check if the environment is safe for a child.

“There are some people that were adopted or in foster care and they want to change the way that foster and adoption works,” Unkrich said. “For me, I am very interested in being a foster or adoptive parent.”
“My mom was ahead of the game,” Holst said. “We read a lot of books about adoption, and she encouraged us to ask questions.”

Holst was not the only one her parents adopted. A few years after she was adopted, her sister was adopted too. Clearly, adoption was not a taboo subject in their household, but Holst says she frequently compares her own path to her sister’s, who does not know her biological father.

 “[My adoption story] is kind of weighing this option, weighing this idea in my brain that somebody gave their life, so I can live. For my sister, somebody was not even willing to step forward to own up for what they had done,” Holst said.

Although a few have the personal background of being adopted like Holst, most members of the adoption club, like Unkrich, are involved because they are interested in working in that field once they graduate.

“I think the adoption club is a great way to spread awareness regarding the experience of adoption,” Holst said. “I did a lecture last week regarding adoption, and it’s surprising how many people have had little to no experience with it. The club provides a great platform to teach others about issues that those who have been adopted and those who have adopted face every day.”

During their club meetings, speakers explain their career field, their adoption story or fundraising for adoption.

“We recently had a man named Chuck come in, and he talked about how his daughter passed away of ovarian cancer and her dying wish was that it would be cheaper to be able to adopt because it’s crazy expensive and very impracticable for many,” Unkrich said. “He started a fundraiser called Chelsea’s Dream Foundation. What it does is give parents scholarships so they are able to afford to adopt.”

This semester, the adoption club is beginning to plan their fundraising ideas to help Chelsea’s Dream Foundation.

Cassi Britt is a senior in child, adult and family services and is the event planner for the club. Her sister works with a family that received money from Chelsea’s Dream Foundation.

“I worked at daycare before and there were children I took care of that had bad home lives, so they went into foster care, and I wondered what happened to them,” Britt says. “It made me want to help children like them.”

This summer, she is going to intern for Youth Emergency Services and Shelter (YESS), where she will be helping children in crises and providing a support system for them.

At a recent club meeting, an employee from IowaKidsNet had an idea to connect her company with the adoption club.

“She [IowaKidsNet employee] talked to us about having a night where parents who have adopted children can drop off their children with the adoption club while the parents can have a date night,” Britt said. “We are currently trying to work out a time to do that.”

Learning from speakers or each other about how to improve the foster system once they graduate is something all members of the adoption club are passionate about — whether they have a blood connection to adoption or not.