



Professional Newsletter

Taking quality photos for a MARE photolisting

We know that not all workers are part-time photographers, so we thought we could make a quick “how-to” guide to help workers get the most out of the photos of the youth on their caseload for Mare.org.

There are a few key things to pay attention to when taking a photo for MARE:

1. How’s the lighting? Is it too dark? Is it too light?
2. Is the youth dressed appropriately? Can I get him or her to smile?
3. Is there a nice area at the residential or foster home that I can use to take the youth’s photo?

Lighting

Lighting can be tricky at times, especially when you’re using a cell phone. If it’s really bright out, try to find a nice shaded area so the youth doesn’t have to squint. This will also keep parts of the image from being overexposed (too bright to show details). As always, natural light is the best for pictures, but if you’re inside try to find a well-lit spot and snap your photo there.

Watch out for shadows on the youth’s face! If possible, have your back to the source of the light. If you face the light source, there’s a good possibility that the youth’s face will appear as a shadow.



The photos you see here of Taevon (C09003) and Jayla (C010202) were taken by their workers.



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Let adoptive parents know that they can learn about foster care adoption at www.mare.org.

Child's appearance

Since this picture will be one of the only images families might see, we want to make sure the youth looks his or her best. Think of what the youth might wear for a school photo and have him or her refrain from wearing revealing, stained, or heavily worn clothing as well as shirts with inappropriate graphics. Also, beware of any identifying information on the youth's shirt such as the name or logo of a school.

Do everything you can to get the youth to smile. Tell cringe-worthy dad jokes, make funny faces, smile yourself, enlist the help of other youth or workers – whatever it takes.

Hair care is another important appearance issue to consider. Unkempt hairstyles can reflect poorly on workers as well as the

youth because others could think nobody cares about the youth's appearance, so be sure the youth's hair is well-kempt.

Posing and taking the shot

"I typically always suggest shooting the picture from above or directly in front of the youth," says Jen Brooks, MARE youth specialist.

"When posing, if it looks awkward to you then most likely it will to others. Youth are very in tune to how they want to pose, so let them naturally fall into a pose and just tweak it.

"Typically, they want to stand naturally with a knee bent and a thumb in the pocket. If they are sitting and not sure what to do with their hands have them cross their hands inward or towards the back of the neck.

"Remember anything that's in the forefront of the camera will look bigger. Really the most important thing is that the youth doesn't look mad, they look clean and there is no evidence in the photo of where they live. And don't be afraid to take a few options just in case."

Location

It may be hard to find a decent area and backdrop for the photo, but if you can get outside, try it! Any sort of foliage will make the photo stand out and look great. Also, try to avoid having the child stand in front of brick and cinder block walls. If they have to, see if there's some artwork on the wall or something to make it stand out.

Finally, if you have any questions, contact us at 800-589-6273.

Photos from another great Michigan Heart Gallery Premiere!



Clockwise from bottom right, Madicen (aka Madi); Emmanuel (aka Manny); MARE's Jen Brooks with her adopted son, Cameron; Cecilia (aka CeCe); MARE staff welcoming guests; Keaton, a star of the 2022 Heart Gallery video.





MARE Adoption Navigator Amber Tiemeyer's family. She now has a larger family after tracking down birth members. Check out her story!

Finding the missing puzzle piece in adoption

Amber Tiemeyer has seen adoption from three different angles – as an adopted child, as an adoptive parent and as a MARE adoption navigator serving other adoptive families.

Her story epitomizes the message to families of “open your heart to adoption” as well as the sacrifice, commitment and love that goes with it. We might as well add “gift” to the package of adoption descriptors because Amber mentioned several times during her interview for this story that she felt “blessed” after being adopted by her parents as an infant.

“My parents made sure to let me know that I was chosen,” she says. “In fact, we had a book – ‘Adopted and Loved Forever’ – that they would read to me all the time. Being ‘chosen’ seems a bit farfetched to me now, but they adopted me through an agency, D.A. Blodget, and I find it kind of cool that I work with them and others now.

“My family has always been great, very loving,

tight-knit. But as an adopted person, you’re always looking for that missing piece; I remember going to the movies, to the mall or out to eat and constantly scanning for someone who has the same physical features as me.

“And I wondered, ‘Could they be my birth family or somehow related to me?’ Not because of anything my adoptive parents did because they were phenomenal and still are, but as an adoptee you’re always looking to fill that void.”

Amber adds that even older adoptees who already know their birth families long for that missing puzzle piece, and they aren’t betraying their adoptive families by seeking it. She encourages adoptive parents to make sure the situation is acceptable and safe and then to be supportive.

“I know it can be threatening, but it doesn’t have to be,” she says. “Just because that child has a desire to get to know their birth family, it doesn’t mean that

the adoptive family lacks anything.”

As Amber began seeking her own birth family 15 years ago, her parents experienced a bit of shock at first but later endorsed the idea. Her adoptive mom often spoke especially highly of the “ultimate sacrifice” that Amber’s birth mother made – knowing she couldn’t meet Amber’s needs – which emboldened her to seek her birth family.

Amber had natural apprehensions about the birth family and how she’d be viewed or even accepted, yet she persevered. The connection she made proved to be life-changing.

“I finally found my birth family when I was 41 and discovered that my birth parents were deceased, but I was able to reconnect with other parts of my birth family,” says Amber. “They welcomed me with open arms as if I grew up and had always been in their family. They wanted to build a relationship not only with me but with my husband and our children.”

Now Amber has a loving aunt and cousins and one uncle who owns

a farm and another who owns a restaurant. The reunited family often meets at the farm, restaurant or other places to enjoy each other’s company.

They mark holidays, birthdays and other special occasions together with cookouts and campfires. Amber knows her “happily-ever-after” story isn’t the same for all adoptees, yet she still wants their adoptive families to take note when their adopted children seek birth-family connections.

And she has another message for both adoptees and their families.

“Adoption takes work; it’s not all rainbows and unicorns,” she says. “I know that firsthand. But I also feel like it can be such a beautiful thing to connect with birth families and such a beautiful thing to see adoption in a positive light. “I know my story is not the same as everybody else’s, but I would encourage adopted children to seek out their birth families and adoptive parents to allow it so their children can cultivate those relationships to find that missing piece of the puzzle.”

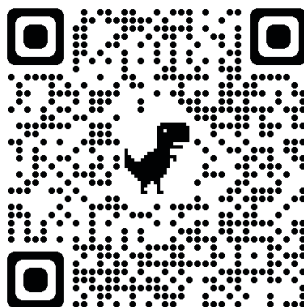
You won’t want to miss the 2022 Heart Gallery video

Talk about a must-see film!

This year’s Michigan Heart Gallery video is four stars and then some. The video is now available for viewing, and it’s titled “It Matters,” a tribute to the youth living in foster care who appear on Mare.org.

As MARE Program Manager Michelle Parra puts it, “The driving force behind the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange is the kids themselves. And that’s what makes their stories so inspiring.”

If you’d like to watch the 2022 Michigan Heart Gallery video, visit: www.youtube.com/VideosbyMare or scan the QR code.



Calendar

December 10 Virtual MARE Meet & Greet

11 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

For more information, contact jessica_thompson@judsoncenter.org or call 734-528-2070.

Amazing fact

Since 2009, 1,257 youth who have been photolisted on Mare.org have been matched with their forever family.



On the horizon

We hope you’ve been able to enjoy our presentations on social media during National Adoption Month. Be sure to follow us on Facebook – www.facebook.com/MichiganAdoptionResourceExchange – and Twitter – @MAREinMichigan – on Michigan Adoption Day, Tuesday, Nov. 22 for special features. We’ll also have more spotlights on Outstanding Adoptive Families through the end of November.