

**TESTIMONY OF KEN MULLNER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL
ADOPTION CENTER AND ADOPTION CENTER OF DELAWARE VALLEY**

**Tuesday, August 28
House Children and Youth Committee Hearings**

**GOOD AFTERNOON CHAIRWOMAN WILLIAMS-BISHOP AND MEMBERS
OF THE COMMITTEE. I APPRECIATE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY.**

**I'M KEN MULLNER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL
ADOPTION CENTER AND THE ADOPTION CENTER OF DELAWARE
VALLEY. I AM JOINED TODAY BY GLORIA HOCHMAN, OUR DIRECTOR
OF COMMUNICATIONS.**

I'M HERE TO TELL YOU ABOUT THREE CHILDREN.

**JASON IS 15 AND, LIKE MOST BOYS HIS AGE, LOVES TO PLAY
FOOTBALL AND BASEBALL. WHEN HE GETS TO GO TO A GAME, HE
PROUDLY WEARS HIS CAPS AND JERSEYS. JASON TALKS AND SINGS
ABOUT GOD, AND SAYS THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT THINGS IN HIS
LIFE ARE LOVE AND TRUST.**

**ELLIOT IS 13, AND HE LOVES MUSIC AND PLAYING OUTDOORS. IN
SCHOOL, MATH IS HIS FAVORITE CLASS, AND PLAYING THE GUITAR IS
HIS FAVORITE PASTTIME. ELLIOT IS SOCIABLE AND FRIENDLY AND
DOESN'T MIND FLASHING A BIG SMILE TO SHOW OFF HIS NEW BRACES.**

**JUIARA IS 7 AND ADORABLE. HER SMILE CAN LIGHT UP A ROOM. LIKE
HER FRIENDS, SHE LOVES TO SWIM AND SHOP. HER FAVORITE BOOK**

IS “WHEN SOPHIE GETS REALLY REALLY ANGRY,” AND HER FAVORITE SONG—THE ONE THAT COMFORTS HER WHEN SHE’S FEELING SAD—IS “WE FALL DOWN, BUT WE GET UP.” IT AFFIRMS FOR HER THAT EVERYONE CAN BE TRIUMPHANT EVEN AFTER ENDURING DIFFICULT TIMES.

ALL OF THE CHILDREN I’VE DESCRIBED—JASON, ELLIOT AND JUIRA—HAVE GONE THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES. THEIR PARENTS WERE NOT ABLE TO CARE FOR THEM, AND THEY ARE WAITING FOR FAMILIES TO ADOPT THEM.

THEY ARE ONLY THREE OF MORE THAN 1600 CHILDREN IN THIS AREA WHO NEED PERMANENT, STABLE HOMES, PLACES WHERE THEY CAN FEEL LOVED AND CARED ABOUT AND WHERE THEY GROW INTO HAPPY, PRODUCTIVE ADULTS. SOME HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR YEARS. IT IS THE JOB OF THE ADOPTION CENTER TO EXPAND ADOPTION OPPORTUNITIES FOR THESE CHILDREN BY WORKING WITH THE AGENCIES THAT HAVE THEM IN THEIR CUSTODY.

WHEN THE ADOPTION CENTER STARTED 35 YEARS AGO, NO ONE KNEW WHETHER ANYONE WOULD WANT TO ADOPT CHILDREN WHO WERE OLDER, LIKE ELLIOT AND JASON, OR WHO HAD LEARNING DISABILITIES, LIKE JUIRA. BUT THE CENTER KNOWS NOW THAT THERE ARE FAMILIES OUT THERE THAT NOT ONLY WANT THE CHILDREN, BUT WILL ADVOCATE FOR THEM. SINCE 1972, WE HAVE FOUND FAMILIES FOR MORE THAN 20,000 CHILDREN.

SOME OF YOU MAY BE FAMILIAR WITH THE WORK WE DO TO HELP BRING CHILDREN AND PARENTS TOGETHER.

- **EVERY MONDAY, THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER RUNS A COLUMN CALLED MONDAY'S CHILD WHICH FEATURES A CHILD IN THIS AREA WHO IS WAITING TO BE ADOPTED. IT IS THE LONGEST RUNNING FEATURE OF ITS KIND IN THE COUNTRY**
- **ON TUESDAYS, THE PHILADELPHIA TRIBUNE, WHICH IS THE COUNTRY'S OLDEST NEWSPAPER FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS, CARRIES A FEATURE STORY AND PHOTO OF A WAITING CHILD.**
- **IF YOU WATCH TELEVISION ON WEDNESDAY EVENINGS OR SATURDAY MORNINGS, YOU MAY HAVE SEEN SPORTS ANCHOR VAI SIKAHEMA ON NBC10 TALK WITH ONE OF OUR CHILDREN ABOUT THE KIND OF FAMILY HE OR SHE WANTS. THIS FEATURE, CALLED WEDNESDAY'S CHILD, IS SPONSORED BY THE FREDDIE MAC FOUNDATION.**
- **AND IF YOU LISTEN TO KYW RADIO, AS I DO –TWO, THREE, FOUR, TIMES—EVERY WEDNESDAY, YOU'LL HEAR ONE OF OUR CHILDREN TALK WITH JOURNALIST LARRY KANE ABOUT HIS OR HER DREAMS OF HAVING A FAMILY.**

TWICE A YEAR, WE HOLD ADOPTION PARTIES WHERE PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN APPROVED TO ADOPT CAN MEET THE WAITING CHILDREN. TWENTY PERCENT OF OUR ADOPTIONS RESULT FROM THESE PARTIES.

SO THIS IS WHAT THE ADOPTION CENTER DOES FOR CHILDREN. FOR EACH ONE, WE DEVELOP A RECRUITMENT PLAN, A WAY TO LET PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT HIM OR HER, AND HOPEFULLY INQUIRE ABOUT ADOPTING. ONE OF THE THINGS WE HAVE LEARNED THROUGH THE YEARS IS THAT MANY PEOPLE THINK ADOPTION IS ONLY FOR BABIES. THEY DON'T KNOW THAT THERE ARE OLDER CHILDREN, CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES, CHILDREN WITH MENTAL RETARDATION, CHILDREN WHO ARE SIBLINGS AND NEED HOMES TOGETHER.

IF YOU ASK ANY OF THEM WHAT IT IS THEY WANT THE MOST, THEY WON'T TELL YOU A BICYCLE, OR THE LATEST NINTENDO GAME OR A NEW COMPUTER. WHAT THEY SAY IS. "I WANT A FAMILY THAT WILL ALWAYS BE THERE FOR ME, A FAMILY WHO WILL CARE ABOUT ME AND THAT I CAN DO THINGS WITH. A FAMILY TO HELP ME WITH MY HOMEWORK AND TALK TO ME ABOUT MY PROBLEMS." ISN'T THAT WHAT ALL CHILDREN WANT AND THAT MOST OF THEM TAKE FOR GRANTED? THESE CHILDREN DESERVE THAT CHANCE TOO.

WHILE THE CHILDREN ARE WAITING, THEY LIVE IN FOSTER HOMES. SOME ARE LUCKY ENOUGH TO BE ADOPTED BY THEIR FOSTER PARENTS. SOME FIND PERMANENT HOMES WITH RELATIVES. STILL OTHERS COUNT ON THE ADOPTION CENTER TO HELP GIVE THEM THE KIND OF LIFE THEY DREAM OF.

SOCIAL WORKERS IN ADOPTION ARE AMONG THE MOST DEDICATED I'VE MET. THEY ARE ON THE FRONT LINE, EVERY DAY FEELING THE CHILDREN'S PAIN, HOPING THEIR HOPES AND DREAMING THEIR DREAMS. THEY AND WE KNOW ONLY TOO WELL WHAT THE GRIM STATISTICS TELL US ABOUT THE CHILDREN WHO "AGE OUT" OF FOSTER CARE AT 18 WITHOUT HAVING BEEN ADOPTED:

- 27 PERCENT OF THE MALES AND 10 PERCENT OF THE FEMALES BECOME INCARCERATED**
- 33 PERCENT RECEIVE PUBLIC ASSISTANCE**
- 37 PERCENT DO NOT FINISH HIGH SCHOOL**
- 50 PERCENT ARE UNEMPLOYED**
- AS A GROUP, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO BECOME DRUG ADDICTED, EXPERIENCE MENTAL ILLNESS AND BECOME VICTIMS OF VIOLENT CRIME.**

WE MUST NOT LET THAT HAPPEN. WE MUST WORK TOGETHER TO MAKE PERMANENCY A PRIORITY FOR ALL CHILDREN. WE NEED MORE MONEY TO BE GIVEN TO ADOPTION SERVICES. WE NEED MORE AGENCIES TO WORK WITH US SO WE CAN FIND HOMES FOR EVERY CHILD WHO NEEDS ONE. AND WE MUST TAKE BETTER CARE OF THE CHILDREN WHO REACH 18, STILL WITHOUT FAMILIES. FOR THESE CHILDREN, BOTH FOSTER

**CARE AND HEALTH CARE COVERAGE SHOULD BE EXTENDED
UNTIL THEY ARE 21.**

**BUT THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR A FAMILY. AND THE
ADOPTION CENTER KEEPS ON PROVING THAT THERE ARE NO
UNWANTED CHILDREN...JUST UNFOUND FAMILIES. WITH YOUR
HELP, WE ARE COMMITTED TO FINDING THEM.**