

The Dodge Family

"From the moment we saw their faces, and they grabbed our hands, we knew these would be our children."

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Attend A Greater Houston Information Meeting

Are you or someone you know interested in foster care or adoption? Don't know where to start? Attend one of our bi-monthly information meetings, which are now being offered virtually in response to COVID-19.

During the Information Meeting, an Arms Wide Coordinator will walk you through the process of fostering or adopting a child or children in foster care. You will also have the opportunity to ask any questions you may have about fostering or adopting a child or children in need, in addition to meeting other families who are interested in becoming foster or adoptive parents.

Arms Wide Adoption Services offers Information Meetings at least twice a month. Meetings are typically held on Wednesdays at our Houston office and start at 6:00 p.m., but in response to COVID-19, we are currently offering virtual Information Meetings. Visit armswide.org/events for more details.

Check Out Our 2019 Impact Report

At Arms Wide Adoption Services, we're committed to transparency. Check out what we accomplished in 2019, including our lean and program-focused financials at armswide.org/about-us/newsletters.

Share Your Story Fuel Our Mission

Have a story to share? We are looking for foster and adoptive families to speak about their Arms Wide Adoption Services family and journey. We are always seeking new ways to share our mission.

In addition to sharing your story with us, we also want to expand our connections in the community. Would you be willing to connect us with your workplace, place of worship, or another group? Invite us to send one of our team members to talk more to your network about how they can transform lives through foster care and adoption.

If you are interested in any of these opportunities, please contact Development and Marketing Manager, Melissa Neeley, at mneeley@armswide.org.

Stay In The Loop Follow Us

Arms Wide Adoption Services posts updates regularly!

Stay in loop by following us on social media [@ArmsWideTX](https://twitter.com/ArmsWideTX), visiting our blog at armswide.org/category/blog, and registering to receive our online communications at armswide.org/get-our-newsletter.

Welcome From DeJuana Jernigan

In this welcome letter, DeJuana expresses her excitement to embark on her journey with Arms Wide Adoption Services as the organization's new President and CEO.

Arms Wide Adoption Services families, friends, and supporters:

I am honored and excited to join Arms Wide Adoption Services as the new President and CEO. As I begin my journey with you, I want to first thank Vikki Finley. For the last 22 years, Vikki has worked tirelessly with the organization. Together, you all have built a an organization with a good reputation and solid financial foundation. I know that following in Vikki's shoes is going to be a monumental task, but with your input, participation, and support, Arms Wide Adoption Services has a bright future ahead.



I would also like to thank the Arms Wide Adoption Services Board of Directors for this leadership opportunity. I recognize I have a lot to learn, but I am committed to investing the time and attention to making sure I get to know and understand the Arms Wide Adoption Services family, culture, and various ways in which we provide services.

You may be wondering, "What does this change mean for Arms Wide Adoption Services?" I would like to assure you this change means a continuation of the great transformational work which is already happening at Arms Wide Adoption Services. You may also be wondering, "Who exactly is DeJuana Jernigan?" Well, I am a long-time child advocate with more than 20 years of experience in this field. I began my journey in child welfare as a Child Protective Services worker in San Antonio. After continuing that work in Corpus Christi, I returned to Houston, my hometown, to pursue a graduate degree in social work. I tried my hand at other roles in juvenile justice, child care, domestic violence, and home and community based services for individuals with development disabilities.

However, I always felt called and compelled to return to the foster care and adoption field. I have spent the last 15+ years consistently advocating and providing services for children and families through foster care and adoption. I have spent the last 13 years in a leadership role at another child placing agency where I provided oversight of operations for foster care, adoption, post adoption, mental health, and residential treatment services in various cities throughout Texas. I am honored to bring those years of experience to Arms Adoption Services, so we can continue the tradition of providing excellent, person-centered support and advocacy.

I cannot complete this letter without expressing how incredibly humbled I am for this opportunity to lead an organization with a 43-year history and a deep commitment to transforming the lives of children in need. I also know that without you, none of this would be possible. Thank you for all you have done to help continue this work. I look forward to our travels together on this journey as we continue to grow and strengthen this organization, so we can continue to transform the lives of children in need for many years to come.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DeJuana Jernigan', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

DeJuana S. Jernigan, MSW
President and CEO

The Dodge Family: “We knew they would be our children.”



Courtney and Brian Dodge have always wanted to adopt, but years seemed to fly by with no “right time” in sight. That was until their friend started fostering a baby girl through Arms Wide Adoption Services. She talked with Courtney and Brian about the benefits of working with a smaller agency. That’s when Courtney and Brian’s adoption journey officially began.

After working with Arms Wide Adoption Services to license their home, Courtney and Brian were selected to foster-to-adopt two adorable brothers. From the moment they met the boys, it was love at first sight.

“From the moment we saw their faces, and they grabbed our hands, we knew these would be our children,” Courtney said.

But forever seemed so far away when Courtney and Brian began to experience many delays during the placement process. When the day the boys could move in finally arrived, a CPS worker told Courtney and Brian that she had never brought children to a new foster home where the kids were so excited. Courtney and Brian attributed this to the brothers’ amazing foster family, who welcomed Courtney and Brian with open arms and prepared the boys for what to expect.

The boys settled in quickly! Of course, challenges were faced. All parents of two brothers at four and five years old face challenges. It wasn’t anything Courtney and Brian couldn’t handle!

“Arms Wide Adoption Services had prepared us for every situation and possible scenario,” Courtney said. “We felt well-equipped and prepared, but most of all, supported.”

Courtney and Brian believe adoption means breaking the cycle of abuse for children in need, while providing them with a life they would not have otherwise had. To Courtney and Brian, adoption is about selflessness and knowing whatever circumstances these kids faced early on in their lives should not define them forever. Courtney and Brian believe all children deserve endless love and attention.

“We started this knowing there was only one aspect of this situation we could control, and that was loving these boys,” Courtney said. “We knew we could love them and that love could heal them from any brokenness they could have ever felt.”

Now, Courtney and Brian believe all those “not the right time” moments was God clearly telling them, “Yes, but not yet.” In January 2020, they were relieved to sign the final paperwork on adoption day. They were also grateful to be surrounded by dozens of friends and family members who were all there to celebrate how good God is with them.

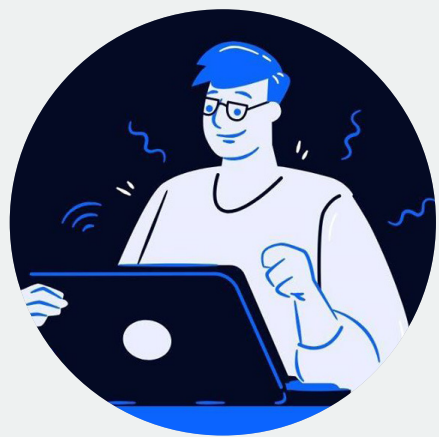


“When my babies sat in the judge’s chair and banged that gavel, it was one of the most incredible moments of my life,” Courtney said.

Strengthening Bonds During A Crisis



Through the help of our Fort Bend Post Adoption Program, the Whitehurt family was able to participate in a virtual 2D art activity together during quarantine.



From COVID-19 to family activities and empowerment, we have expanded our online resource center to help families during the pandemic. Gain access at armswide.org/services/resources/



The Brock family turned to sidewalk chalk and family yoga to have fun together during these challenging times.

COVID-19 Response

Even in these uncertain times, Arms Wide Adoption Services is committed to supporting children and families through the foster care, adoption processes and beyond.

You may be wondering, how has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the children and families we serve?

It is in times of crisis children become most vulnerable. Research indicates the presence of stressful life events increases the likelihood of children abuse. Limited resources, loss of income or job, and displacement are all factors which can contribute to child abuse.

The safety of the children, families, and communities we serve continues to be our number one priority. That is why we have adapted many of our current programs to continuing supporting our families:

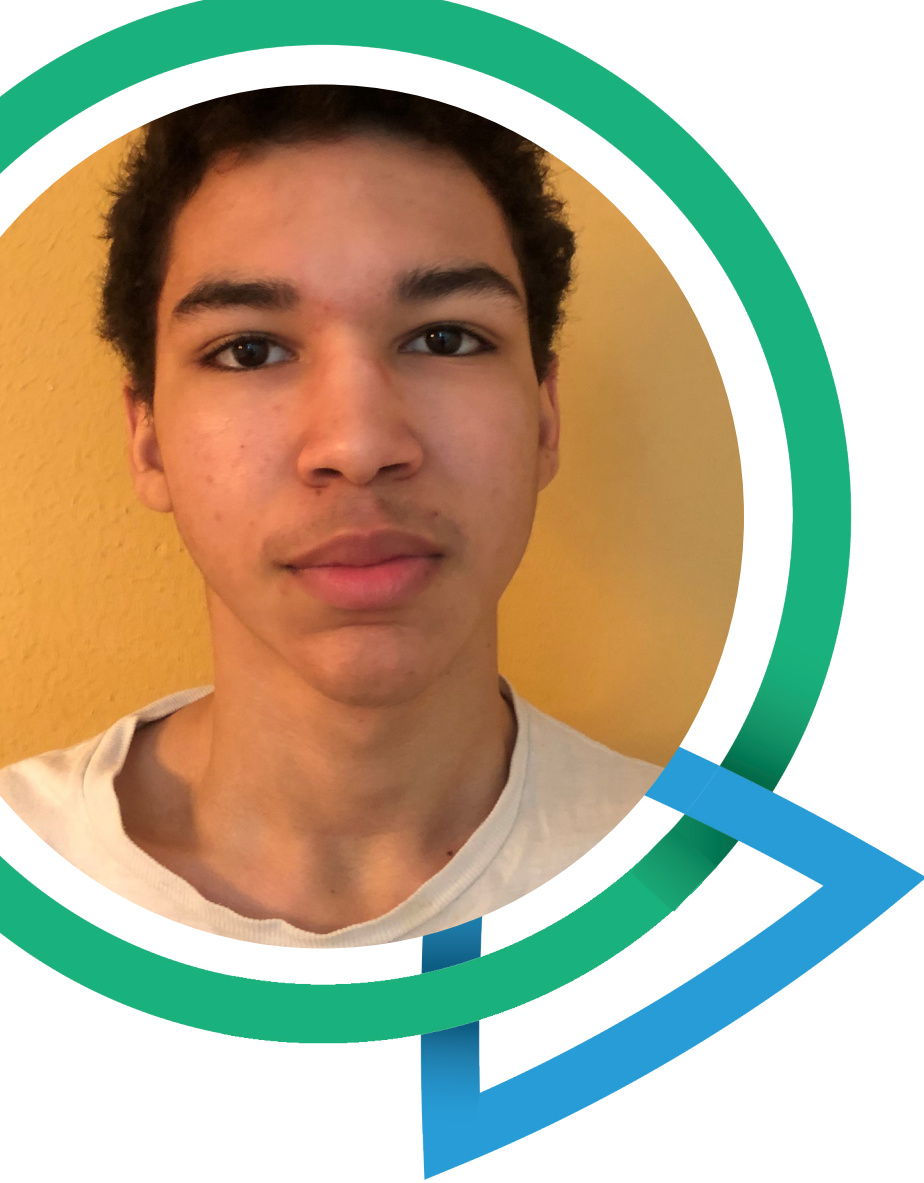
Caseworkers and support staff are available by phone around-the-clock to support families enrolled in our foster care, adoption, post adoption, and post permanency programs.

Families do not have to wait to start the process to foster or adopt a child in need – especially when Texas is experiencing a shortage of families in addition to the pandemic. Although we typically hold Information Meetings and trainings in-person at our office, we are offering virtual or one-on-one meetings and trainings to ensure the safety of our families and children.

Additional virtual contact and support to families can include: Intakes, psychology or psychiatric evaluation and testing, families and individual coaching or counseling, crisis counseling (including creating plans for families for conflict resolution in a crisis), case management, mentoring, support groups, other virtual discussion groups, and home visits.

Together, we can navigate these unprecedented times of COVID-19 and ensure no children are left behind during this crisis. Here is how you can help:

1. If you are able to give, please consider making a special gift to support Arms Wide Adoption Services programs during this public health crisis. You can give online at armswide.org/donate.
2. With children out of school, many families are using alternative measures of child care. Kids may be staying with a neighbor, family friend, or a relative. Unfortunately, this is where we see higher incidents of abuse. Protecting children is an adult's responsibility, so take this time to stay informed.
3. On that same thread, be an observant neighbor and community member. More children are home with their families for longer, extended times than usual. Be aware of the warning signs, and report abuse when you see it.



Meet Conner, 17 Years Old

Conner has spent more than half of his life in foster care. Conner wants nothing more than to be adopted and find permanency. He would love to have a family that could protect him, and he would especially love to have a pet that he can take care of.

Conner enjoys playing games, including board and video games, and he wants to have family game nights! Conner LOVES holding a good conversation with anybody, even if it's about the simplest things such as Whataburger. He also enjoys go-carts and laser tag. Conner is eager to learn new things and is excited about

starting his first job, so he can save up for his own cell phone.

Conner would thrive in a home with kids his own age. He is open to receiving help and support in regards to his academics and his future goals. A single parent or a couple who has time to spend with Conner would be an ideal fit for him.

If you're interested in learning more about Conner, please contact WWK Recruiter and Adoption Coordinator, Stephanie Griffith, at 713-681-6991 or sgriffith@armswide.org.

Therapeutic Family Activities We Cherish

In March 2020, our Fort Bend Post Adoption Program offered a support group activity for families, where young participants met to develop their own visual examples of what community means to them.

Through this activity, one participant was able to open up about her school experiences, which is now allowing her parents to better advocate for her within this particular community.



Fulfilling Families Luncheon

Rescheduled due to COVID-19, Arms Wide Adoption Services will host its annual luncheon on **Thursday, September 17** at Houston Country Club.

Donations to the Fulfilling Families Luncheon help ensure Arms Wide Adoption Services can continue to help even more children in foster care connect with the loving adoptive families they need and deserve. We are thrilled to welcome Melissa Radke as our keynote speaker. Melissa is an author, public speaker, television personality, and social media influencer. Melissa and her husband, David, adopted their two children after years of infertility and loss. Her keynote will have you laughing, crying, and laughing until you cry as Melissa shares stories on the joys of adoption and the pains of parenting. We are also elated to have Frank Billingsley, KPRC Channel 2's Chief Meteorologist, back as this year's luncheon emcee. We look forward to seeing you in September!



Learn more about this event at armswide.org/annual-luncheon



2020 Emcee, Frank Billingsley of KPRC-TV Channel 2 giving remarks at the 2019 event



2019 Co-Chairs, Michele Buckley and Emily Kelley, at 2019 event

Save The Date For November Events

On **Thursday, November 12**, Arms Wide Adoption Services will host its annual All In For Adoption Texas Hold 'Em Tournament at River Oaks Country Club.



Co-Chairs, Will Maxwell, Brittany Hildebrand, Luke Cone, and Steve Kennedy, at the 2019 event



Jewel Pierce, Sarah Yoder, and Mayleen Lee Tsang showing off their trophies at the 2019 event



Learn more about this event at armswide.org/all-in-for-adoption



Mark your calendars for **Tuesday, November 10** as Arms Wide Adoption Services participates in Coastal Bend Day of Giving, a 24-hour charitable challenge.



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Arms Wide Adoption Services' mission is to transform the lives of children in need of safe and nurturing permanent families. Arms Wide Adoption Services is funded by private donations, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, and the United Way of Greater Houston.



United Way of Greater Houston

Give While You Shop:



Finally Forever

Over the last 43 years, Arms Wide Adoption Services has placed more than 2,100 children with their forever families. Meet a few of the newest Arms Wide Adoption Services families below:



The Arnold Family
February 2020



The Hernandez Family
February 2020



The Brock Family
March 2020