

# The Couch Family

“Be open to expanding your mind from what you initially thought to the right fit you didn't think about.”

Page 4



## INSIDE

2

Agency  
Updates

3

“Why I  
Foster”

4

The Couch  
Family  
Spotlight

6

It Takes  
a Village:  
Kinship Care

7

Upcoming  
Events

8

Families  
Fulfilled

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# Take the First Step Information Meeting

Are you interested in learning more about how you can transform the lives of children in need through foster care or adoption? Take the first step by attending one of our monthly Information Meetings, where an Arms Wide Coordinator will talk through the process of fostering or adopting from foster care and answer any questions you may have. Visit [armswide.org/events](https://armswide.org/events) for more details.

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## Share and Connect Fuel Our Mission

We are always seeking new ways to share our mission, and we 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, adoption, kinship care or post adoption services. If you are interested in helping us share our mission, please contact Development and Marketing Coordinator, Emily Person, at [eperson@armswide.org](mailto:eperson@armswide.org).

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## Stay In The Loop Follow Us

Arms Wide Adoption Services posts updates regularly! Stay in the loop by following us on social media [@ArmsWideTX](https://twitter.com/ArmsWideTX) and visiting our blog at [armswide.org/category/blog](https://armswide.org/category/blog). You can also register to receive our online communications at [armswide.org/get-our-newsletter/](https://armswide.org/get-our-newsletter/).

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## A Year in Review 2021 Impact Report

2021 was an exciting year with the launch of our It Takes a Village initiative, return to the in-person Fulfilling Families Luncheon and program growth in both our Foster Care Adoption and Post Adoption/Post Permanency programs. Check out what we accomplished in 2021, including our lean and program-focused financials at [armswide.org/about-us/newsletters](https://armswide.org/about-us/newsletters).

# “Why I Foster”

In Texas, there are over 28,000 children in foster care every day. Some live with foster families, but others are living in treatment centers or are waiting in unlicensed facilities due to a severe shortage of foster homes. This May for **National Foster Care Month**, Arms Wide foster parents Chiara and Tim Phan shared their motivations for fostering and some words of wisdom that they have learned along their foster care journey.

## What motivates you to be foster parents?

“We have a desire to share our hearts and home with children who need safety and love. We recognized in ourselves eagerness and skills that make us fit for this role.”



*The Phan Family*



## What advice do you have for foster parents?

“Our purpose is to love a child, in the best way we can love, for as long as they need our love. My advice is...know your purpose for becoming foster parents. When change and unexpected developments are constant, our purpose is what grounds us.”

## What is the biggest reward of your foster journey?

“The growth of the children. You can literally witness the attention, love, and care you poured into them come out in their personalities and growth. You see it in their development, in their increased trust, in their increased confidence.”



*If you have foster care on your heart, we would love to meet you and walk you through the process of becoming a licensed foster parent. Email [info@armswide.org](mailto:info@armswide.org) to get started today.*



# The Couch Family: Open Heart, Open Mind

Dewayne Couch, a single father, adopted teenagers Evan and Jacob from foster care in January 2022. In this Family Spotlight, Dewayne shares his journey to adoption and why he chose to adopt teenage brothers.

## Beginning the Journey

When Dewayne decided to start a family, adoption was already on his mind. He was adopted by his stepdad when he was just 2 years old, and his adoptive dad was always a guiding force in his life. At first, he felt hesitation about adopting as a single parent, but he realized that families come in all shapes and sizes. Children need loving families, and he knew he could provide that. In March 2020, he had been considering adoption for a while and felt like the time was right to go to an Arms Wide Information Meeting to start the process of adopting through foster care.



## Open mind, open heart

Throughout the journey, Dewayne learned to keep an open mind. “You will go into this with your brain in a box, and it will get all shaken around,” Dewayne said.

*“You have to be open to expanding your mind from what you initially thought to the right fit you didn’t think about.”*

There is a severe shortage of families willing to foster and adopt sibling groups in Texas. So when Dewayne’s coordinator at Arms Wide asked if he could be open to adopting two siblings, he agreed. “Something in me said this was the right move.”

## The time is now

Dewayne met teenage siblings Evan and Jacob in the spring of 2021. They were living in a group home at the time, so Dewayne visited them regularly as they got to know each other. After a few weeks of visits, Dewayne received a devastating phone call from his dad: he had been diagnosed with stage 4 cancer.

He considered pausing the adoption process to focus on his father’s health issues, but his dad encouraged him to “go start your family.” It was both a season of loss and a season of growth, because while his dad’s health declined, his relationship with the boys grew.

*“It was God’s way of putting his two angels there when I needed them,” Dewayne recalled.*





## Siblings belong together

Dewayne was motivated to adopt teenage siblings because he believes siblings belong together. He didn't want to break the brothers up, and that's often what happens in foster care.

*"It felt like the right thing to keep them together," said Dewayne*

He also learned that keeping siblings together through adoption makes the transition easier for everyone. The boys have someone they can relate to, someone they have a connection to already. "It seemed like it was easier for them because they had each other to help ease the transition," Dewayne said. "If you're considering adopting one child and wonder if you can handle two: yeah, you can, and it may actually be easier."

## Building trust

Leading up to their adoption day, Dewayne gave the brothers consistent reassurance. They needed this because they had been let down so many times in their lives already. "A teenager's guard will be up, but you have to not take it personally," he recalled. "You have to take a step back and let them get close on their own." Dewayne noticed a change after they finalized the adoption: they were guarded; now they are more open. They know that they don't have to move to another temporary family again.

What is life like now? They like to eat out, go to movies, watch wrestling, play video games—and just enjoy normal teenage activities! They also enjoy having a divided household where football is concerned: Jacob is a Texas Tech fan, Evan roots for TCU, and Dewayne is a diehard USC fan.

## Advice for others: Adopt teenagers

Dewayne encourages other potential adoptive parents to adopt teenagers. "Everybody shies away from teenagers," Dewayne says. "It can be tough because they are going through normal teenage emotions that we all went through, plus trauma. But there is also this rewarding feeling of giving hope that they aren't going to age out of the system." Now, he's able to be a father and a mentor. He is there for them to show money management, life skills and how to operate in a family unit. "There's a lot of reward in knowing you're doing something for teenagers."





## It Takes a Village: Kinship Care

As we mark the 1-year anniversary of our *It Takes a Village* initiative, which aims to disrupt the disproportionality of Black children in foster care, we reflect on the past year's achievements and the important role that kinship care has on our children in care.

Black children enter foster care at a rate of twice that of their peers, and they often do not end up with a family who is equipped to support their cultural identities. Over the past year, *It Takes a Village* has doubled the number of Arms Wide families who are committed to nourishing Black children's cultural identities as foster, adoptive or kinship caregivers.

Kinship caregivers play an important role because they allow children to maintain a biological connection and give the stability of a familiar setting. When a child cannot be reunited with biological parents, kinship care is often a child's best path to permanency. Kenya, pictured above, was adopted by her aunt this year and recently got to celebrate her Sweet 16 birthday party—her first birthday party ever—with her forever family.

## Community Giving

We are so thankful for corporate and community partners who invest in our children and families!



*Ascend Performance Materials* keeps our Angel Room stocked and organized, and they also provided our families and staff with special treats around the holidays.



*KPMG LLC* brought joy to our families by fulfilling the holiday wish lists for 350 of our children.



*St. Francis Episcopal School* donated hundreds of pajamas, book sets and toiletries for our children during their annual Pajamarama drive.



# Fulfilling Families Luncheon

On May 5, Arms Wide hosted its 8<sup>th</sup> annual **Fulfilling Families Luncheon**, a heartwarming event supporting our mission to transform the lives of children in need of safe and nurturing permanent families. The Luncheon featured Keynote Speaker Sixto Cancel, who grew up in and aged out of foster care and has been recognized by the White House as a “White House Champion of Change.” Cancel is the Founder and CEO of Think of Us, an Action Tank driving change in child welfare. He shared how years of abuse, failed adoptive placements and aging out of foster care drove his passion for child welfare reform. Emily Bradford, an Arms Wide adoptive mother, also shared her heartfelt story of adopting two brothers from foster care in June 2021 with her husband Trey. Thanks to our Co-Chairs, Lindley Arnoldy and Jenni Swyka, wonderful Host Committee, and all our generous supporters, we raised over \$145,000 to support the children and families we serve.



*Arms Wide President and CEO DeJuana Jernigan, Luncheon Co-Chairs Jenni Swyka and Lindley Arnoldy, and Keynote Speaker Sixto Cancel. Photo Credit: Jenny Antill*



*Luncheon guests gave a standing ovation after Emily Bradford's inspirational testimony about her family's adoption from foster care. Photo Credit: Jenny Antill*



*Trey Bradford, KPRC's Chief Meteorologist and Fulfilling Families Luncheon Host Frank Billingsley, and Guest Speaker Emily Brandford. Photo Credit: Jenny Antill*

## Save the Date for November Events

On Thursday, November 10, Arms Wide Adoption Services will host its annual All In for Adoption Texas Hold 'Em Tournament at the River Oaks Country Club. Sponsorship opportunities and tickets are now available at [armswide.org/all-in-for-adoption](https://armswide.org/all-in-for-adoption).



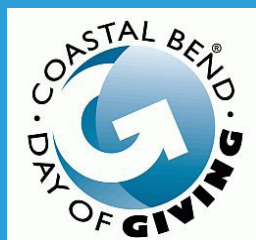
*Co-Chair Steve Kennedy poses with the Texans cheerleaders. Photo Credit: Steven David*



*Trace Williams, Carson Miller and Luke Cone count their chips during the tournament. Photo Credit: Steven David*



*Champions Kendall Bell, Sabrina Ham and Noelle Reed pose with their trophies. Photo Credit: Steven David*



Mark your calendars for **Tuesday, November 8**, as Arms Wide Adoption Services participates in the **Coastal Bend Day of Giving**, a 24-hour charitable giving 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, foundations and the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Scan the QR code to contribute to our mission and help children and families in Houston and South Texas!

## 45 Years of Fulfilling Families

We are celebrating our 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Fulfilling Families this year! Since 1977, Arms Wide Adoption Services has matched more than 2,250 children with their forever families. Meet a few of the newest Arms Wide families:



*The Weaver Family*  
August 2021



*The Pratt Family*  
January 2022



*The Green Family*  
April 2022