

## *We Built Our Own Extended Family*

My name is Layla and this is my story about how a bond was formed with the foster parents who were assigned to my three children.

I first met the foster mother in August 2002 at a meeting about reunification with my children. Earlier in 2002, my children were taken from me because I was using meth and marijuana. I was found unfit to take care of my children and the Children's Division placed them with a foster family, Heather and Andre. My children were 7, 10, and 12 years old.

I was lucky to have had them all placed together in one home. After the children went to foster care, I admitted myself into a Rehabilitation Center. I was there for thirty days and completed the program. I also faced my legal troubles. Then I was ready to start the reunification process. During the first few meetings I had mixed feelings about Heather. I felt as though she didn't want me to be there. Once I had accepted responsibility for what was happening, I then realized that Heather wanted nothing more than for me to have the children back. Heather was determined to help in any way she could, within her guidelines as a licensed foster parent. Heather was honest about it all because she cared.

She and Andre helped me as much as they could with anything I needed after my children were placed back with me. Whether it be reading the newspaper to help me find a better job, or giving me some clothes that their children had outgrown, or just being someone for me to talk to, they helped me. The children were placed back one at a time with me and when it was time to pick up my boy twin from Heather, I thanked her. She had my kids in her home for six months before I was given custody. Heather, Andre and myself always stayed in contact after that. They said that they do not always get to see the kids they help once they leave their home, but they were such a big part of my children's life that I didn't want to take that away from them or the kids. I appreciated them so much. To this day they still help when I need it and they know if they ever need my help I will be there to give it to them. We have made our own little extended family. They are my guardian angels. I am 4 years clean and sober now. I owe thanks to my mother who has always been there for me and to Heather and Andre for showing me that I can do anything I put my mind to. Mostly, I thank my beautiful children who never gave up on me I Love You!

Thanks for letting me share my story.