

# The Leymon Family!

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER



We sought adoption because while we wanted kids, we didn't feel any need to be biologically related to them. We had seen heart gallery portraits of waiting children around town, so we knew that there were kids needing families and we thought it just made sense to match up our desire for a child with one of these children.

When we were matched with D we were over the moon. We weren't expecting a teen but were pleased that very quickly, it felt perfectly natural to have a 14-year-old son whom we had just met. We enjoyed getting to know him - he was very funny and very kind, and he was active in sports so a lot of our time together involved supporting him on his various teams. We especially had a good time around Halloween every year, as we watched scary movies and went to haunted houses together.

He had a long trauma history and had mixed feelings about adoption. He wanted a different type of family than the one we were offering to him. Over the years, with terribly inadequate support for him and for us, we ultimately had to accept his preference for more independence and less connection from us. He moved out and we didn't hear from him for over a year.

When this happened our two biggest fears were that his life would take a turn for the worse, and that we would lose contact with him. The good news is neither of those worst outcomes happened. D finished high school and enrolled in community college. He got back in contact with us and while we don't have the relationship with him that we had imagined, we are hopeful that he knows we are here for him when he needs support.

I want legislators to know that teen adoption needs more focused attention and support. Developmentally teens are at a point in their life when they are seeking independence and identity separate from their families - adding to the trauma adoptive families and kids already have to work through. Yet the trainings available in Oregon do not pay any special attention to the unique needs of teen adoption.

We need better data and research on this unique population. We don't track what happens with these adoptions, and can't answer basic questions about how kids do long-term (including how many stay connected to their adoptive families). Until we can answer some important questions, we will continue to cause more pain and trauma than is necessary to kids and families.

Until D decides to use his voice to advocate for what he thinks would have helped him and what would help kids who are going through what he went through, I can only guess what he wishes had been different. But I will say that while adoption may not be the answer for every teen in foster care, the current alternatives are group home care or aging out independently. We know those aren't good options, so it is crucial that we find ways to support teens in stable familial settings. Teens need a healthy, non-professionalized relationship with committed adults who can provide emotional, developmental, and practical support.

*\*D gave permission for this profile*