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Six children from ages 5 to 21 keep Princeton foster parents on the go

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By Rachel Warmke, rwarmke@qconline.com

It might be cheaper by the dozen, but the Kieser family, of Princeton, Ill., is waiting for it to get easier by the half-dozen.

With children ranging in age from 5 to 21, parents Tim and Denise have their hands full, juggling sports games, band practice and extracurriculars.

"You're making college decisions, and you're making kindergarten decisions," said Denise, a stay-at-home mom.

Tim, who works for Akron Services Inc., laughed, describing the age ranges of their kids as "crazy. It makes me feel like a grandpa sometimes -- we just had kindergarten 'meet-the-teacher' tonight."

But the couple, who won the Bethany for Children and Families' Foster Family of the Year Award in 2009, takes it all in stride.

Back in October 2003, the two became licensed foster parents with the blessing of their four biological children: Seth, now 21, Lindsey, 20, Kristy, 15, and Luke, 14.

"I had kind of just always had it in my heart for adoption since I was a little girl," said Denise.

The couple worked through Bethany for Children and Families, a not-for-profit organization that has been in the Quad-Cities for 112 years and works to keep community children safe and strengthen families. The group offers a variety of services including adoption, counseling, foster care and education.

Two years passed with potential cases falling through each time before the family received word that two young brothers would be placed in their home: Torence, 2, and Tayshaun, just a month old at the time.

Despite the Kieser family's excitement, the transition proved difficult for young Torence, who was frightened and untrusting from a neglected past.

"It took half a year to be able to hug him (or) rock him," recalled Denise. "He was a sad boy when we first got him."

"We just tried to show him as much love as we could and show him that we cared about him," added Tim. He said the 2-year-old began latching himself onto the couple's elder daughter, Lindsey, because she reminded him of his own biological sister.



Photo: The Kieser family of Princeton, Ill. -- parents Tim and Denise and children Seth, Kristy, Luke, Lindsey, Tayshaun and Torence.

As the boys grew more comfortable in their new environment, Tim and Denise said they ensured the boys still had regular contact with their mother and six biological siblings, who live with various relatives.

"They're African-American boys, and their parents came from a different culture," said Tim. "And we still want them to know and experience that, too."

In 2008, after it was deemed the boys would not be able to return to their biological family, the Kiesers began planning for adoption. Today, with four kids still at home and two away at college, the couple divides their time between practices and pick-ups.

"Well, there's definitely a lot of times when we're split up as a family -- kids will be doing stuff here and there," Tim said with a chuckle. "We just go day to day and see how it's going to work."

Still a licensed foster family, the couple offers respite care for area foster children who need care for a weekend or short period of time.

Undoubtedly, the adoption helped their own biological children learn about responsibility and has made the entire family closer, the couple said. "It's fun to see all the different ways our kids discipline with them, talk with them, joke with them, tease them -- they're just fun boys," Denise said.

As their older children are continuing to grow up and deal with more serious issues, "the boys put a definite lightness to our family," she said. "I feel like God has blessed us with helping kids to have a chance in life and to be who they should be."

Bethany seeks award nominations

Bethany for Children and Families is seeking nominations of outstanding persons, families or businesses within 60 miles of the Quad-Cities. Nominees do not have to be affiliated with Bethany to be eligible.

Recipients of each award will be honored at the Bethany Family Awards Night on Nov. 3 at the RiverCenter in Davenport.

Nominations are due Sept. 7. Categories are:

- **Ruth Evelyn Katz Adoptive Family of the Year:** Honors an adoptive family that shows a strong commitment to strengthening and encouraging an adopted child's growth.
- **Foster Family of the Year:** Honors a family that creates a safe home for children who have been displaced. The foster family exhibits extraordinary courage, patience, and care while working with foster children.
- **Leadership Family of the Year:** Honors a family that exhibits a strong commitment to raising their children while also making the Quad-Cities' community more child- and family-friendly.
- **Corporation of the Year:** Honors a "family-friendly" company that offers its employees benefits, policies, and practices that support employees in balancing their work and home life.
- **Youth Philanthropist of the Year:** Honors a young person who has helped strengthen the Quad-Cities by demonstrating outstanding leadership skills and philanthropic actions.
- **Community Service Group of the Year:** Honors a philanthropic group that gives to the Quad-Cities by helping nonprofit organizations through volunteering and donations.

Submissions should be emailed to jhager@bethanyinc.org, faxed to (309) 797-2386 or mailed to Bethany for Children & Families, Family Awards Nomination, Attn: Jenny Hager, 1830 6th Ave., Moline, IL 61265.

For more information or to get an application, visit www.bethanyinc.org or call (309) 736-6633.