

CASA Volunteer Helps Connect Father With Son

February 23, 2021

After updating his address at the DMV, Jeff Harris was contacted by CPS and was notified through a letter that he had young son that was in their custody. While he was aware that Patrick's mother had been pregnant before their relationship ended, she told him that she terminated the pregnancy. Jeff immediately contacted CPS and took a paternity test. Once it was confirmed that Patrick was his biological son, Jeff took all actions directed by CPS

including attending parenting classes, individual therapy and drug testing to ensure that he could gain custody of his son. Having had a difficult past, prior to learning about his son Jeff was already on the path to creating a better future for himself and now he could share that with Patrick.

Patrick and his younger sister were removed from his mother and her boyfriend's home due to medical neglect, neglectful supervision and physical neglect. Both of his caregivers had an extensive criminal and CPS history. Multiple reports had been made to CPS over the years regarding the caregiver's substance abuse and



neglect of the children, including an older sibling that was ultimately placed with a relative, however the children were not removed from the home until the most recent report after both children had missed doctor's appointments and scheduled surgeries. Both children were diagnosed with Failure to Thrive; Patrick had thyroid and neurological issues, had a physical condition that required a surgical operation and needed glasses. While several appointments had been scheduled, Patrick's caregivers failed to bring him in and continued to neglect his medical needs.

Patrick and his sister were placed in a foster home for 2 months then moved to a relative's home where they stayed for another 4 months until the caregivers told CPS the children could no longer stay in their home. Both children were moved into another foster home, a month later Patrick's sister was placed with paternal relatives and months later was placed with another relative who has become her permanent caregiver. Two months after Patrick's sister left the foster home they were both living at, he moved into a new foster home. Soon after is when Jeff found out about Patrick. This is also around the time that Patrick and his sister's CASA, Debbie, was appointed to their case.

Later that year, Patrick underwent the surgery he needed- it was successful and there are no ongoing issues. He had an appointment with his neurologist and is otherwise in good health. There had been some concerns regarding Patrick's behavior following visits with his mother, but she stopped attending and since then the concerning behaviors have stopped.

CASA volunteers strive towards keeping children connected with family. They advocate first for reunification when safe and possible.

If reunification is not safe or possible, CASA volunteers will advocate for the child to be adopted by, or live with, other relatives or family friends. In this case, reunification with Patrick's mom was not in his or his sister's best interest. Both children however did have relatives that wanted to be their permanent caregivers. After ensuring that placement with Jeff was in the best interest of Patrick, CASA Debbie did everything she could to make sure that they had the resources and support they needed to maintain a thriving environment for Patrick.

Jeff now has permanent custody of Patrick and they are both thriving in this new chapter of their lives together. They showed their gratitude of CASA's support by collecting toys for children in foster care



for their CASA volunteers to gift them for the holidays. Included with the donation was this heartfelt letter from Jeff:

"When I first found out my son was in CPS custody, I knew right then I would do whatever it took to get custody. I went into it blind, not knowing what to expect or what to do. At the first court date I met Patrick's CASA, Debbie, who was kind and genuine. She kept me informed the entire time, held progress meetings with me, offered additional counseling if needed and was always ready to go the extra mile. They did a family tree that was really cool and held family support meetings where each person could express their concerns for the children and set goals as well. Debbie and Heather (Debbie's CASA Supervisor) are amazing people with huge hearts. "