

The Detroit News

OPINION

Column: My adoption agency saved me

Shamber Flore

Published 10:48 p.m. ET March 7, 2018 |

Updated 10:13 a.m. ET March 8, 2018



Flore (Photo: Courtesy of the Becket Fund)

At the age of 5, gunshots and sirens were my lullaby. I was exposed to gangs, prostitution, drugs, and abuse before most kids learn their ABCs. My earliest memories are walking to the bus stop for school a half mile away by myself (even in the cold Michigan winters), or going with my mom to foreign places while I waited anxiously for her to come back from long meetings with strange men.

My mom was a prostitute, and when my dad happened to be around he only added to the abuse in my life. My two siblings and I were just the byproducts of their rocky relationship, and so we were burdens. We were dragged from apartment to apartment, never knowing what the next day would bring or what the next meal would be.

Until one day, a knock on the door changed my life. It was Michigan's Child Protective Services.

These strangers took me from the only home we had ever known, though unhealthy and dysfunctional, and separated me from my brother and sister. During the next chapter of my life, I was bounced from family to family, and I almost never saw my brother and sister. Each time I came to a new home, I got my hopes up that this would be my forever family. But it always felt like once again, I was packing up my bags, moving on to the next strange place.

That changed when an adoption agency called St. Vincent Catholic Charities helped to piece together the brokenness of my life by finding a permanent home for me.

In 2005, St. Vincent placed me and my siblings with the Flore family. I quickly came to know them as mom and dad. They were stable and loving — toward each other, and just as importantly, toward me and my siblings. Not only did they give us good food, warm clothes, and cozy beds, they nurtured and cherished us, and gave us a quality education. Finally, I was able to begin real healing. I had a chance to lead a happy life. And in my new family, I've learned what love feels like.

Every child in foster care deserves to find a loving home like I did. But because of a desperate shortage of willing families, particularly for minority, older and disabled children, many won't. In Michigan alone there are nearly 13,000 children in foster care. At this moment, over 340 of those kids are just waiting to be adopted, and over half of those are minority children like me. As time goes by, the prospect of finding a family willing to permanently adopt a foster child diminishes. Every year approximately 600 children in Michigan "age out" of foster care, which means that at the age of 18 they officially leave the foster

system never having found a permanent family, let alone resources or skills to make it on their own. These children are much more likely to end up in poverty and much less likely to graduate from high school, let alone college.

Adoption agencies like St. Vincent make a big difference in alleviating this problem and finding more families to provide a home for these kids. Through St. Vincent's work last year, 79 children were placed in foster care, 24 children had their adoptions finalized, and 17 additional children began the process of finalizing an adoption. Most of the children in St. Vincent's care are minority children, and it excels in providing extra support for families with special needs children and finding homes for especially hard to place kids like teens or larger sibling groups like mine. And because of its faith-based mission, St. Vincent can reach different segments of the population, recruiting families like my mom and dad who would not have adopted with another agency.

But now a lawsuit brought by the ACLU is threatening St. Vincent's and other faith-based adoption agencies. The ACLU is suing the state of Michigan for partnering with religious adoption agencies like St. Vincent simply because they are religious and follow a faith-based mission. If they succeed, St. Vincent will be forced to close the doors on its foster and adoption programs, and countless children still trapped in the foster system and in need of a loving home may never find it.

St. Vincent rescues children from the most vulnerable, most disadvantaged backgrounds like mine and gives them a chance to be part of a loving family and have a normal, healthy, happy childhood. We can't let the ACLU take that away.

Shamber Flore, 20, was adopted through St. Vincent Catholic Charities in 2005. She lives near Lansing.

Read or Share this story: <https://detne.ws/2ttlwFv>