Jason and Heidi Skinner, Sierra’s Family of the Year, proves love knows no bounds.

With two biological children, Heidi and Jason Skinner began their journey with Sierra Forever Families in 2012 hoping to adopt their third and final child. As some of the Skinner family is deaf (Jason is deaf and their oldest daughter is hard of hearing), the Skinners were also hoping to be placed with a deaf or hard of hearing child. Three weeks later, they were introduced to Heaven, a six-year old profoundly deaf girl in need of a forever home. The connection was almost instant and she quickly became a natural part of the family, calling Jason and Heidi “Mom and Dad” from day one.

Shortly thereafter, the Skinners got a huge surprise learning they were pregnant with their fourth child, Landen. Before they knew it, they received a call with an even bigger surprise: Addison, a nearly two-year old girl believed to be fully deaf and with no speech, was in need of placement. The Skinners met Addison in 2014 and didn’t hesitate. “When we got the call, we couldn’t say no. We had to do it. Once we met her—just, wow,” remembers Jason. “We had to have her. We felt like we just had to offer our hearts to have her with us. I just felt like this was the place that she needed to be.”

Five children later, Heidi and Jason have created a warm, welcoming family and have helped Heaven and Addison make leaps and bounds in their development. When Heaven arrived at age seven, she was still in pull-ups, couldn’t read, had limited sign language skills and had major behavioral issues. Today, at age 10, Heaven has progressed to grade level and mainstreams with kids her age in school.

Outside of school, Heaven is developing into an active, social kid with lots of friends. She is a competitive cheerleader and, despite her lack of hearing, is the best tumbler in the entire gym. “Heaven is the center flyer and is the one showing the hearing children how to tumble,” says Heidi. “The whole gym has embraced it—the coaches have even learned some sign language. She’s a different kid than when she first came” says Heidi.

At age three, Addison has also made tremendous progress. The Skinners quickly discovered that Addison is not fully deaf, but hard of hearing. They continue to work with her to develop sign language

Continued on page 3
Sierra Forever Families

ABOUT HOMECOMING
Homecoming is a publication of Sierra Forever Families.

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OUR MISSION
We transform the lives of children in foster care by building and nurturing permanent families.

Sierra Forever Families invites you to help a child in foster care on May 3rd

Your gift during the 24 hour BIG Day of Giving enables Sierra to find permanent loving families for children in foster care.

YOU can help in three ways:
• Make a donation
• Ask 10 friends to give
• Like and share posts on Facebook and Twitter

For more information about the BIG Day of Giving contact Crystal Brooks at cbrooks@sierraff.org or 916.368.5114
I Am Finally Home!

Everything we do at Sierra Forever Families is for our children to be able to learn, play and grow with the support, love and safety of a family. Over the years, due to your generosity and support, we have been able to assist over 3,300 local children in finding a forever family while helping thousands of others to nurture and grow the family bond.

This Homecoming issue will outline how we are meeting our goals through the stories of our children and families: from the family that came forward to adopt two deaf children, to the Guides that show our children a sense of wonder in our mentoring program, to the 13 year old that still needs a home to call his own.

All of these stories frame our mission of building and nurturing permanent forever families. Our therapeutic story indicates we will continue to walk with our children and families throughout their adoption journey.

Thank you for being a part of that journey. Everyone can be involved: tell your friends about the needs of youth in foster care, volunteer, become a mentor, donate, and adopt.

The opportunities are limitless and together we can insures that all our children can say, “I am finally home!”

Visit SierraFF.org for more great stories, blogs and resources.

Continued from page 1

skills. “When she came to us, she didn’t have any eye contact. We had to work with her to even look at us to start the signing,” explains Jason. “It was hard to get her to that point. We want to make sure she has communication skills so she can have a better life.”

As the Skinner family continues to grow and develop together, Jason and Heidi are thankful to have worked with Sierra Forever Families to find and fully support their daughters with their needs. “In the deaf community we see kids who can’t really sign or talk and it’s heartbreaking,” says Jason. “Having that communication is critical, so anybody who wants to adopt or foster, I always send them to Sierra.”

Bob Herne, CEO
Becoming a Stronger Family

I am Tomas, married, and father to four of the craziest and most amazing children on Earth. We chose foster-to-adopt because we wanted older children. After the multitude of interviews, modules, certifications and the home study, a brother and sister were placed with us in fall of 2011. At the time, they were in 1st and 2nd grade. We thought we were well prepared to receive them, but we weren’t. Honestly, I don’t think you really are until they are in your home. Words like “self-harm”, “defiance”, “aggressive”, “extreme anxiety” were all words we knew, but had never seen in action. With support from Sierra and additional classes in trauma therapy, we finalized their adoption in July 2012.

In fall 2013, we decided to further expand our family and adopt another sibling set. We again went through our paperwork and certifications. In July 2014 we adopted two brothers. Oh, snap! We did not expect to see yet another deeper level of crazy! Four kids vying for our attention with more challenging behaviors.

We turned to Sierra again for help. Through their Therapeutic Support Services program, our children are able to work with a therapist, while we attend a support group for families. The therapeutic support provided by Sierra has kept me from countless sleepless nights. We are becoming a stronger family every day. We do have some set backs, but overall we are in a much healthier place and it only looks up for us.

Meet Aaliya

Aaliya is a cheerful 13 year old with lots of things to say. She enjoys drawing, painting, dressing up and playing video games. Like most kids her age, she also loves riding her bike.

Aaliya enjoys attending church and singing in the choir. She likes school, and has lots of friends. What Aaliya needs now is a Forever Family who will go to church with her, ride bikes with her, and let her teach them how to draw butterflies and bees.

There are more than 3,000 local children in foster care, like Aaliya, who need our help. We can create a brighter future for our children living in foster care by ensuring all children grow up in a Forever Family. Join us on this journey.

Everyday, 10 local children enter foster care. Our challenge as a community is to find more families, like the Skinners, who want to open their hearts and homes to provide the love and commitment that all children need. Many are like the child below who is waiting for a family.
Families and permanency come in many forms. Wonder, our mentoring program for children in foster care, links adults with children to provide those opportunities for just having fun, exploring, talking and going to special places. Beyond the outings, perhaps the most important aspect of Wonder is the constancy in the relationship that develops between mentor and child.

Karen Patterson has been a mentor to Jimmy* for 5 years. When they were first matched, Jimmy was only 8 years old. Even though they came from different backgrounds and had a wide age gap, their match was “magical”, according to Tamara Saylar, the Wonder coach for this match. Tamara added that “Karen and Jimmy genuinely care for each other.”

Karen and Jimmy were looking forward to celebrating their 5-year anniversary together, but Karen came down with a serious illness that prevented her from scheduling the kind of face to face meetings and expeditions the two had shared over the years. Instead, they kept their relationship alive through letters and phone calls. When Jimmy earned an honors award at school, he made sure that Karen got a copy. He knew that she was a great supporter of his, and he wanted to share his success with her.

Karen has recovered and she and Jimmy reinstated their outings again. Their coach ran into them recently and she said, “They both looked so happy to be back together. We don’t know what the future holds for them, but we do know that the bond of this match cannot be broken.”

Everyone needs that special love, knowing no matter what life throws in their path, the other person is there for them. Jimmy has that with Karen.

Karen learned something else this past year as she was dealing with her illness. “Much as I admired the Wonder program throughout my years of involvement, my experiences of the last year have taken that appreciation to a new level.

*Name changed for confidentiality

To learn more about how you can support this program and bring a world of Wonder to a child in foster care, visit us online at SierraFF.org or call 916.368.5114.

“From the first time my son said ‘you’d make a good forever Mommy’…I knew I was going to adopt him. Less than a year later that became a reality with Sierra Forever Families. I am now the proud mom of 6 kids.” —Kathy C.

Sierra Forever Families believes foster care should be temporary. To learn more about how you can help a child find their forever family, visit SierraFF.org.
We need you.

TOGETHER WE CAN ENSURE ALL CHILDREN GROW UP IN A FOREVER FAMILY!

Please consider helping children in foster care by:

- Sharing this newsletter
- Attending an orientation to learn more about adoption
- Becoming a mentor
- Supporting our local children with a donation

Together we can create a brighter future for our children living in foster care. I hope you will join us on this journey.

Visit sierraff.org for more information.

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Sierra Forever Families invites you to participate in Expressive Giving, as a meaningful way to honor or remember a loved one. Expressive Giving gifts may also celebrate an occasion, birthday, anniversary or graduation, or commemorating a special moment in someone’s life. Visit our Donate page at SierrAFF.org.
Donations that change lives.

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So more of our resources can benefit children in foster care, this issue provides only a partial listing of our generous donors and the various ways of giving. We value and thank all of our donors!

To learn more about how you can make a difference in the lives of children in foster care contact Christie Shorrock at cshorrock@sierraff.org or 916.368.5114.

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