

## Happy ending for a little boy and his dad

Thanks to the sharp instincts of a child intervention team—and a new father with a willing heart—a little boy in foster care will grow up with the loving biological family no one previously knew existed.

Child Intervention Services brought the six-month old boy and his two older siblings into care because their mother was struggling with substance abuse and was unable to care for them. The two older children were under Permanent Guardianship Order and plans were in place to also find a permanent home for the little boy, who had been living in foster care for more than six months.

Throughout this crisis in the mother's life, the case management team was able to gain the mother's trust. She confided in them the truth about the child's paternity. In a few weeks, a DNA test would prove it.

When the newly-discovered biological father arrived in the caseworker's office, the situation seemed like it would be another disappointment. The young man was unkempt, unshaven and admitted to using drugs and alcohol daily. He had no job.

The caseworker recalls what happened when the young man learned the results of the paternity test. "His whole face lit up," he said. "He looked at me in awe and said, 'wow—I'm a father?' He shook my hand and said, 'Guess I'd better clean up my act.'"

After many months in foster care, the little boy—now a toddler—had grown very attached to his foster family, who had grown equally attached to him. The love and trust between them would become an important bridge to help the child connect with his biological father.

To ensure the child felt safe, the caseworker brought the child's foster parents along for the visit. In the company of these familiar and trusted people, the little boy met his father for the very first time.

"The father just fell in love with his son," said a caseworker with the North Central Alberta Child and Family Services Authority. "It was amazing how quickly they bonded."

The young father was determined to have his son with him. He participated in all planning sessions and worked with the **Outcome Based Service Delivery team and community agencies** to learn parenting skills. He stopped using drugs and alcohol. He got a haircut and shave and found a stable job where he worked so hard, he was quickly promoted to foreman.

The **foster family** and the father teamed up to prepare the little boy for moving into a new home. They invited the father to come to their home every night so that he could tuck his son into bed and be the last person the child would see before he fell asleep.

A transition that was anticipated to take months took only a matter of weeks. "It was obvious to everyone that the little boy had bonded with his father and biological grandmother," the caseworker said. "When the visits were over, he would wave goodbye to his foster parents because he wanted to stay with his daddy."

The little boy has now moved into his father's home and an application is before the court to rescind the Permanent Guardianship Order so the father can be sole guardian of his child. Better still, the father is helping his child maintain the important connections to his mother, his siblings, and his foster family.

It's a great example of what happens when we pull together to help families. It's also a testament to the child intervention team's dedication and to the extraordinary bond between a parent and child.