

SPRING 2021

# SPOTLIGHTS OF HOPE



## DID YOU KNOW?

- **April is Autism Awareness Month.** Family Support Services provides services to those on the Autism spectrum.
- **You can become a Champion of Children** and join our monthly donor circle to ensure children's needs are met year-round. Visit us at [dabsj.org](http://dabsj.org) and click Give Today for details.
- **The Adoptive Family Support Network (AFSN)** funding was restored by the State of Michigan and Heart of West Michigan United Way in December 2020. AFSN programming offers post-adoption support to thousands of families in Michigan. Welcome back AFSN!
- **DABSJ is most grateful to receive \$150,000** in funding from the CARES Act to support behavioral health services and academic support for children living in our Residential program in fall 2020.

## The Best Joy You Can Experience: Teen Brothers Adopted Amid Pandemic

Jason and Kelly Noling both came from very big families. Their parents had multiple siblings, and there were always plenty of aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandkids around. When it came time to start their own family, they had discussions on whether or not they wanted to move forward with natural childbirth or grow their family through adoption. They decided at this point of their lives, adoption was the best way to go.



*The Noling Family (left to right) - Harley, Jason, Koda, and Kelly*

"I've always wanted to be able to help a child out, and know that I was making their lives better than where they came from," said Jason Noling. "So that is pretty much what solidified our decision."

The Noling family connected with D.A. Blodgett - St. John's in 2019 to start this process. One night, Kelly was scrolling through the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) looking at all of the children currently waiting to be adopted in Michigan. This is where she stumbled across 14-year-old Harley's picture.

"Her hands flew up, and she gasped. When I asked what happened, she said that he was the one," said Jason. "I went over to the computer and looked at the photo, and said okay, let's get this started!"

While Jason shared this moment of their story, Harley, now 15, smiled and laughed to himself. When asked how he felt hearing this, he replied, "I've heard this story about a hundred times, but I love it." *Continued on next page*



## Meet Mary, Our President/CEO!

This past December **Mary Mullett, LMSW** joined DABSJ as President/CEO. She brings with her 23+ years of experience and a true and deep passion for the work.

**"What drives me to be in this leadership role is being part of changing the system for kids and families. I want to change the policies and practices that just don't make sense in our work and create positive change for the kids and families that we support,"** said Mary.

*Read more inside.*

## Brothers *Continued from cover.*

One of Jason's favorite memories was the second time they went to visit Harley at his placement before moving in with them. One thing they learned about Harley was how much he loved basketball and how good he was at it, so he thought they could play a game.

"I neglected to think that at the time, I was 35 years old and I don't have the same kind of lung capacity as I used to have. I tried my best to keep up with him and I did, but I was very sore and very out of breath at the end of that [visit]," said Jason. "Even after all of that I drove the entire way home with a smile on my face. I knew that this was just going to be one thing in the growing list of things that we could do together. And I knew that this was just going to be a great fit. I knew it from the beginning."

Harley remembers exactly how he felt when he first met Jason and Kelly. "Really happy since I've been in foster care, like, all my life," said Harley. "I thought - these could be the people!"

Harley was placed with the Noling's on October 28, 2019, and his adoption was finalized July 15, 2020. Because of COVID-19, the court hearing was held over Zoom. However, they made the best of the situation, and had family that they knew tested negative of COVID-19 gather at the house to celebrate. There were balloons, presents, cake, and Harley even wore his favorite red suit. The whole family wore red since it was Harley's favorite color. "I could breathe a sigh of relief. I could finally call him my son," said Jason.



After Harley was placed with the Noling's they continued sibling visits with Harley's older brother, Koda. They expressed interest in adopting the 17-year-old, and asked their worker at DABSJ if this was possible to do before Koda turned 18. Their worker received the adoption case on August 11, 2020. The state timeline goal for adoption is normally ten months, but their case worker engaged all of the different parties of the adoption process to make sure that all were on board with prioritizing his adoption. Koda was placed with Jason and Kelly Noling on

October 6, 2020 and his adoption was finalized on October 20, just two weeks before his 18th birthday!

"We were able to keep their existing family and add it to ours," said Jason. "The only family that Harley has really known is his brother and if we were to break up that bond, there would be a lot less joyous moments."

Now that Harley and Koda are officially part of the family, the Noling's are excited to do as many fun things as they can - together. Harley and Koda haven't been able to travel outside of Michigan, and Kelly and Jason have family spread across a few states. They're excited to travel more once it's safe. They also love to spend time outdoors, go camping, watch movies, cook, and play video games together. Jason says he is even looking forward to helping Harley with his school work.

**"I think Harley and Koda have been the best things to happen to me and Kelly," said Jason. "To be able to have two sons whom I love with every ounce of my heart, to be able to do things with and teach, and go through ups and downs of life with - I think that's probably the best joy that one person can experience."**



## Mary *Continued from cover.*

Mary's skill set will advance the DABSJ mission of helping children and empowering families by providing safety, advocacy and support. She is dedicated to ensuring that DABSJ's core value of equity, diversity and inclusion are embodied in each of our programs and operations.

**"I am humbled and honored to have the opportunity to work alongside an amazing team at DABSJ. Knowing this organization for many years in the sector and knowing its reputation for solid programs that strengthen children and families in west Michigan, I am excited and eager to begin this next chapter with the DABSJ Team,"** said Mary.

"I'm looking forward to seeing where we are at as an organization in future years. We have a lot of work to do as an organization and we also have a team with a lot of heart. I wouldn't want to do this work with any other team and look forward to moving DABSJ forward - together," she concluded. If you would like to learn more about Mary, visit our blog Work of Heart at [dabsj.org](https://dabsj.org).



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# TOGETHER FOR KIDS

A Campaign for  
D.A. Blodgett – St. John's

The capital campaign has now raised \$9.6 million – bringing us to over 96% of our \$10 million goal! Thanks to the generosity of over 490 donors, we have the incredible opportunity to better serve more kids and families by centralizing our services to one campus and positioning the agency solidly for the next 25+ years.

We know a lot has changed in our world and at DABSJ since the campaign began, and we are currently working on refining and re-visioning the plans for our new facility to best accommodate the needs of our kids, families and staff. We will finalize building design by May with our architects, Integrated Architecture. The contractor selection process will follow, and we look forward to breaking ground in the fall of this year, moving into the facility in late 2022.

While the timeline to start construction has shifted slightly due to COVID-19, our campaign goals remain the same:

- Integrate our programs and facilities, improving our effectiveness and client outcomes.
- Save approximately \$100,000 in annual operating costs.
- Increase our service capacity.
- Being together on one campus for kids and families!

**Thank you to our generous donors** who invested in the future of DABSJ, ensuring that we empower families by providing safety, advocacy, and support for many years to come.

Please consider supporting the campaign by visiting [dabsj.org/together-for-kids](https://dabsj.org/together-for-kids). Give \$100 or more and receive a commemorative star in the lobby of the future building.

## 56th Annual Guild Ball

Our 56th Guild Ball went virtual this year but that didn't stop our community from gathering together to unlock hope for children and families. Thank you to the St. John's Guild for pivoting to make sure this important event continued and to our incredible sponsors and guests who helped raise \$139,000!

### Thank you to our 2020 Guild Ball Champion Sponsors:

**Baudville**

**Mill Steel Company**

**FOAM-iT**

**Jeff and Erin Needham**

**Tim Flory - Honigman LLP**

Visit the Events section of [dabsj.org](https://dabsj.org) for a full list of sponsors, and save-the-date for this year's event, November 20, 2021!



BE THE KEY  
TO UNLOCKING  
HOPE.



## Thank you, DABSJ Supporters!

Despite collective hardships that COVID-19 brought this year, our dedicated donors, helped us exceed our 2020 fundraising goal. This holiday season, the total number of donors who supported children and families through in-kind gifts or donations increased by 46% from last year! We can't sustain and advance our mission without your support. We're humbled and inspired by the generosity of our donors.

## Welcome Regenail Thomas, Vice President of Employee Experience



DABSJ is excited to announce Regenail Thomas has been hired as Vice President of Employee Experience.

He began his role on March 8 and brings more than 20 years of experience working in human resources in a wide range of different business environments and leadership roles. Most recently, he worked as Employment/Equity/ADA Manager at the State College of Florida. Prior to that role, Thomas was the Senior Human Resources Manager for Foot Locker/Champs Sports located in Bradenton, Florida.

"We are thrilled to have Regenail join the DABSJ team," said Mary Mullett, President/CEO of DABSJ. "His lived experiences, expertise and passion for supporting our team members, as well as the children and families in our community, makes him the perfect fit for this role."

He holds a bachelor's degree in Management and Human Resources from Park University in Parkville, Missouri, as well as a master's degree in Adult Education from Elmira College in Elmira, New York.

# Foster Care Steps Up During Pandemic

## MAY IS FOSTER CARE AWARENESS MONTH

During the COVID-19 pandemic our foster care team embraced the opportunity to be creative to ensure continued engagement with our foster families despite the barriers COVID-19 brought. Care packages were provided for our foster parents and delivered to their doorsteps.

Even during a pandemic, we were able to support 223 children in foster care! However, one of our greatest needs remains having enough foster parents to provide safe and loving homes to kids. We are offering virtual foster care orientations each month. We would love for you to join us and learn about the first step in this process. For more details please email [fosterparentinfo@dabsj.org](mailto:fosterparentinfo@dabsj.org) or call 616.451.2021.

**RIGHT NOW WE  
HAVE 4 TEENS  
THAT NEED A  
FOSTER HOME.  
CAN YOU  
HELP?**



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FOR MORE INFO EMAIL  
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## Champions of Children: Join Today and Make a Lasting Impact

Many aspects of 2020 made it memorable, but for DABSJ we won't soon forget the tremendous generosity of our donors. The outpouring of support from our community was a bright light for which we are so grateful. We want to specifically recognize our monthly supporters – who help sustain our ongoing programs and help children and empower families by providing safety, advocacy, and support.

During the past year we saw an increase of 27% to our number of monthly donors! Monthly donors make a lasting impact as they provide crucial and consistent funding to attain a safe, nurturing home for every children and a supportive community for every family.

### Did you know that an annual donation of:



**\$3.91 a month** can provide monthly transportation costs for foster child(ren) to visit with their birth family

**\$7.30 a month** can provide one therapy session to help children with trauma, anxiety, depression, and/or other mental health issues



**\$18.75 a month** can provide one week of camp for emotional needs for youth

### Thank you to our donors for their monthly commitment that continues our transforming work!

Adam J. Boes	Mary Mullett
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### Become a monthly donor today

by visiting [dabsj.org](http://dabsj.org) to learn more or returning the enclosed donation envelope. Join our Champions of Children monthly giving program dedicated to empowering children and families!