In June of 2012 my husband and I took in twin toddlers through Project Family, a partnership between the Department of Children and Families and Lund. This program matches adoptive families with children who are in the State's custody but will not be returning to a parent or other family member and have been released for adoption. We were identified through this program because we were actively working with Lund, not necessarily wanting to adopt a newborn, and open to sibling sets to include twins.

Our children were 19 months old when they moved in with us. We used to say we went from "0 to 60" overnight, but now I believe we were being modest!

From the outside, I think adoption is seen as something really sweet, bringing families together, perhaps bringing children out of poverty, abuse, or neglect and into loving, happy, healthy homes. Once the adoption is complete, all is well in the world. Love conquers all. Life is good. I am here to tell you that this is a really, really big misconception.

My husband and I are overachievers. Before becoming parents we felt capable of accomplishing anything we put our minds to. We were accustomed to our hard work and perseverance paying off. Taking the adoption route in forming a family quickly taught us that the traditional way of doing things would not work.

What we learned is that when you adopt, even an infant or toddler, you are not dealing with a clean slate by any stretch. Before a baby is even born, they can experience trauma. It's called toxic stress. When a birth mother is experiencing stress, doing drugs or craving them, dealing with mental illness, intertwined in domestic disputes, struggling to get by....whatever it is, a toxic environment is formed for the growing baby and it can have a lasting impact. We learned that 85% of the brain is developed by 18 months of age. A child's experiences in the first couple years of their life shape how the brain develops - this is huge. If a baby doesn't form an attachment with his/her primary caregiver, it can result in significant issues with future parent figures. I can tell you that for an adoptive parent who longs to love a child and feel that love in return, this can pose a significant disappointment and ongoing relational struggles.

Beyond this, we have learned how very, very powerful genetics are. Despite everything we do for our kids, we have found ourselves battling the genetics our children arrived with and the impact of their early childhood trauma: anxiety, depression, reactivity, lying, cheating, defiance, threats, sleep disturbances, disorganized attachment, impulsivity, guilt, shame, fear, irritability, aggression, the list goes on. Not quite the picture perfect scenario one envisions when they hear about an adoption, right? This is our reality, and it is exhausting.

Since we began working with the Post Permanency professionals at Lund, we have come to understand that what we are doing is not traditional parenting, it is therapeutic parenting, and what we are experiencing is not what traditional families around us are experiencing in raising children. This validation alone has been a game changer.

Our post permanency workers have provided us with tools and guidance around how to parent our children for the best possible outcome - a healthy, connected, stable family. I will admit that there were times I wasn't even certain this was possible. Dissolving adoptions isn't out of the question. Believe or not, some people quit and I can understand why. This is a marathon, not a

sprint. That is our reality. Thankfully we have the professional, compassionate, and dedicated help of Lund's post permanency staff. We know that they are going to be with us every step of the way - whether we are stumbling and falling or making a rock solid run at the finish line. We are thankful for them and credit them with keeping our family whole.

Please increase base funding for Post Permanency Services Programs by $300,000.

Hannah Manley
Panton, Vermont
Adoptive parent of two and recipient of post permanency services.