

# *Ellie's Dream*

By: Rachel Kuhr, MSW, LCSW

November has come quickly this year. Once again, it's National Adoption Month. Oh no, you say, I just read last year's article about this, and here it is again. This year, I am feeling sad and more reflective than usual, because National Adoption Month comes as we are facing the loss of the person who started JFS, and me, down the road to adoption. That person was Ellen Rabin. So, before I launch into my appeal to you to consider becoming foster families, let me give you a little background.

After the passing of Ellie Rabin, of blessed memory, I have had the opportunity to reflect on her creation, namely, the adoption and foster care programs here at JFS. According to legend, when Ellie was asked by community members about working with JFS to adopt internationally and privately, she herself started the process to get JFS licensed for adoption in 1994. The following year, her program was accepted by the State Wide Adoption Network-SWAN-as an affiliate agency. This allowed JFS to provide services to children in foster care and their families who wanted to adopt. Her first home study referral was received in October 1995, according to the database her husband, Harold, set up for her. By the time she sent me the complete database upon her retirement in June 2005, there were over 1,500 lines, each representing a child or a family who received services.

One of my first tasks when I came on board as Ellie's assistant in August 2003 was helping her get the foster care program up and running. She had learned that to just approve a family for adoption from foster care was not enough. Often counties wanted to do the placement as a "foster-to-adopt," and see how it went. So together we wrote a program description for the state, then the foster care program policies, and eventually the foster parent manual. By the time Ellie retired, leaving the entire program in my hands in June 2005, our program was established. We actually provided our first foster care placement in December 2006.

Since then, the program has plugged along, as Ellie envisioned, but it has not gotten very big. She had dreams of a dozen or more families, each either caring for children so that they could have a "forever family," or waiting to take children in need of a safe home at this time. In the ten years since that first placement, we have fostered a number of children, and done many adoptions. What we have not done is been able to grow large enough to meet the need in the community.

Each week we get around five calls from local agencies seeking a home for a child, or a group of siblings. Often they need a home NOW. Today it was three girls, ages 2, 8, and 11. Yesterday it was two different fourteen-year old girls. Last week, a sibling group of three was in immediate need until the county could determine if grandma was able to raise them long term. Mostly we have to turn down the referrals.

We are too small because we don't have enough families when we get those calls. In spite of the nine children in care today, and the two who were adopted in September, after three years in our

foster home, we need more families. We need: Families to take kids today, even if only for a little while. Families to take angry and unhappy teens who have had one too many foster families, one too many traumas, and are not able to stay where they are now; Families who know how to soothe a child struggling through the loss of a parent, who at times was loving and caring and at other times angry and addicted; Families to tell children “it’s not your fault, the adults are supposed to keep you safe, not make you unsafe.” We also need families willing to take Jewish children in need, because although those calls are few, when the need arises, we would like to be ready.

Once again it is November, National Adoption Month. I ask you to again consider - Can you or someone you know be the family that these children need? Can you help us meet the challenge that Ellie Rabin set up for us ten years ago - to be there when we get the call? If you want to know more, do not hesitate, just contact Leslie ([lrutter@jsofhbg.org](mailto:lrutter@jsofhbg.org)) or Rachel ([Rkuhr@jsofhbg.org](mailto:Rkuhr@jsofhbg.org)) at JFS at (717) 233-1681.