

Downey Side encourages Adoption Awareness Month

BY AMANDA MARINACCIO

With more than 130,000 children in the United States between the ages of seven and 17 living in foster care, Downey Side Families for Youth, a New York City-based adoption agency, reached out this month to educate Bronx residents on the benefits of adoption.

In honor of National Adoption Awareness Month, Downey Side, in the Bronx at 1639 Parkview Avenue, the former Our Lady of the Assumption Convent, opened its doors to community members on Sunday, November 15 and offered information to prospective parents on the adoption process and the needs of adopted children.

Although the seminar was not as well attended as hoped, Anna McNamara of Downey Side will consider it a success if it results in the adoption of a single child.

"It's kind of hard to get people interested in this, especially with the economy," said McNamara, who adopted her son, now 16, when he was nine years old. "People don't understand that there is so much help available. In addition to emotional benefits, families who adopt are eligible for monetary benefits."

McNamara encouraged prospective parents to attend a Downey Side family training program called 'exploring adoption.' Downey Side also offers educational advocacy for adopted children. The adoption agency connects families with doctors and dentists as well. It hosts support group meetings once a month, a picnic in the summer and a holiday party in the winter.

"I think people tend to think it's the children's fault they're in foster care, but you can't blame them," McNamara said.

"They don't know why they were taken away from their families. Some of the profiles we see are frightening, to imagine what some kids have witnessed. It's almost like an epidemic, what's happening to children in our own country."

Former Bronx resident Reverend Paul Engel founded Downey Side, a national non-profit, in 1967. Downey Side's Bronx office opened in 2006 and has successfully placed 15 children in loving homes.

"We would like to let people know how wonderful it is to give a child a chance at a decent life, which they otherwise would have never experienced," McNamara said.

"After some time in a safe and secure home it's amazing to see the hope return to [his or her] face."

For more information call (718) 822-2343.

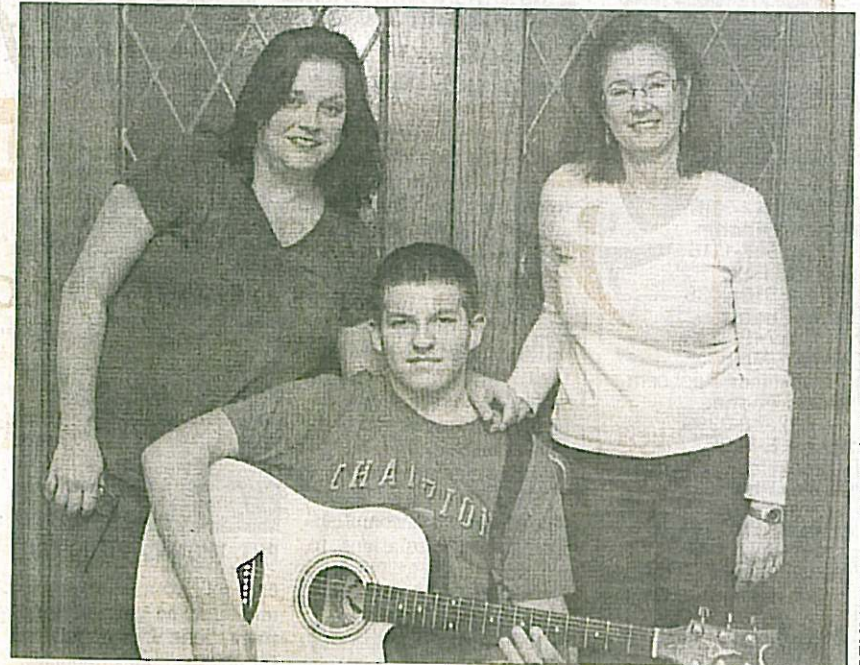


Photo by Kevin Heckman

Downey Side Families for Youth hosted a seminar on the importance of adoption on Sunday, November 15 in honor of National Adoption Awareness Month this month.

(L-r) Anna McNamara, Downey Side NY area director, Ryan McNamara, 16, Jean Griffin, Family Life Advocate