



## Foster Parents: Mentors, Teachers, Care and Recreation Specialists

Mentors, Teachers, Care and Recreation Specialists. Ed and Elsie Salmi and their daughter, Lisa, have played all of those roles as parents and grandparents to the many members of their biological family and to many more foster children who have been placed in their care over the past several years. They provide much more than room and board; they have made significant impacts on the lives of the children in their care. As therapeutic foster care parents with the Georgia Parent Support Network (GPSN), they serve as key members on each child's wraparound care team. They advocate, provide loving care, and teach living, social, and academic skills. The relationship between the Salmis and GPSN is a mutually fulfilling one. The Salmis communicate with agency staff regularly, drive many miles to participate in planning or reunification meetings, and provide their expertise from years of experience to agency staff.

The Salmis' impact on the lives of children with emotional disturbances and behavioral differences is clear when speaking with Samuel and Jonathan, who currently live with them. Jonathan has been in foster care for six years with both birth family and non-birth family foster parents, but he has spent the last few months with the Salmis. He notes that a large difference between his life with the Salmis and his life in the past is the amount of time the Salmi family spends teaching him new skills and playing with him. Jonathan will excitedly report all of the things he has learned since living with the family, including cooking, reading, helping others, managing anger, and speaking more clearly. He says, "Lisa and Elsie work on reading with me and speaking English, [while Ed] shows me about the garden and looks out for me." According to Jonathan, "Lisa is my mentor because she understands, corrects me, and shows me about trucks and stuff." Jonathan says he has changed

"a lot because I don't fight and know when to walk away." For fun, Jonathan plays basketball, football, Nintendo, and he goes swimming with Samuel, Ed, and Lisa. The impact is clear—Jonathan is a healthy, loving kid who states, "I am proud of where I am."

A much shyer Samuel echoes Jonathan's feelings about his life. Samuel says that living with the Salmis is the first time he has been away from his birth family. He has lived with the family for the past year. According to Samuel, he has learned how to "be good, not to lie, and read." His foster family helped him find his first job outside of the home at Georgia Diversified. Samuel is now "happy because it feels good to work," and Elsie is helping him save his money. He hopes to buy a guitar one day. The Salmis provide fun activities for Samuel including basketball, baseball, and kickball. Samuel also enjoys helping Lisa feed the horse and work on cars. According to Samuel, Ed is his role model because "he works in the garden, is nice and respectful, and helps people."

Georgia Parent Support Network relies heavily on the team members like the Salmis who work on a daily basis to enrich the lives of children. The variety of skill-enhancing activities and the hands-on approach taken by therapeutic foster families, birth family members, and community team members assists in ensuring that many children, including Jonathan and Samuel, will grow up to reach their goals and fulfill their dreams.

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