Fostering a love for Apopka

Our Family Has Fostered a Love for Apopka
By Julie Lively

Being married to a former Navy quartermaster, I’ve moved my family all over America. But nothing compares to the joy of small-town life in Apopka.

Not only is this tight-knit community an ideal place to raise our three biological boys, but people here also go out of their way to support the three girls we are fostering. And that means the world to my husband, Jason, and me.

As public school teachers, every dollar counts. So when friends and community groups proactively donate items like cribs, clothes and school supplies – or cook a meal or offer to babysit – it makes me realize just how blessed we are to call Apopka home.

Since Jason and I started fostering in March 2015, we’ve had eight children enter our home through Community Based Care of Central Florida. Some need a safe place for a night or two; others stay for several months. We have three girls in our care now – one is 5 and two are 8 – and they are like sisters to our boys, ages 6, 8 and 12.

Before teaching, I was a youth case worker in Lake County. Time and again, I saw just how important it was for children in the foster care system to lead “normal” lives, with strong ties to everyday activities most of us would take for granted.

In our case, all six of our kids love the outdoors, so we’re grateful to be part of high-character nature clubs like Boy Scouts Troop 10, Cub Scouts Troop 857 and American Heritage Girls Troop 8013. My family’s proverbial “village” encompasses our schools, church, neighbors and extended family as well. Even Perkins restaurant – where a sweet lady makes animal balloons on the weekend – puts a big smile on my kids’ faces.

We can never underestimate the power of community when it comes to raising healthy kids, especially those who need a little extra love and compassion. My family is living proof that people’s simple acts of kindness go a long, long way.

Not everyone is called to be a foster parent, but everyone can make a difference in the life of a vulnerable child. See how you can contribute by visiting www.ProtectandInspire.org.

~Julie Lively teaches seventh-grade civics at Tavares Middle School. She and husband, Jason, a math teacher at Apopka High School, have lived in Apopka for five years. They are in process of adopting one of the girls in their care.