

MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR FAMILIES



***Brad & Tammy Howard Family
Cheyenne***

When our family found UPLIFT, we were beaten down and isolated. Our newly adopted 7 year old son, Anthony, was presenting some behavioral challenges that couldn't just be loved away.

Anthony was different from other kids his age. He hadn't spent a lot of time around other kids or even attended school. He was a 7 year old in the first grade, and still couldn't recite his ABC's. He was angry and aggressive. He felt abandoned, no matter how many times we reassured him that his birth mom loved him too much to continue to raise him in a house where she couldn't promise she'd stay clean.

He was also angry. Anthony spent his first six years in an unsafe environment, survived being abducted at the age of five, lived with a new family for a year who couldn't adopt him because of the parents' health challenges, and wound up with us. And we were not his mom.

The staff at UPLIFT cared about us – not just our son and his struggles, but the entire family. When Anthony misbehaved in public, people glared at us as his parents. When he threw a fit in the store, judgmental glances were common side effects. At school, many of the parents banned him from their children's birthday parties or celebrations. Some teachers were amazing: teaching gently, loving boldly, guiding caringly. Others were harsh, demanding, and easily angered by his aggressiveness. He was called a liar because no one believed him when he said he was adopted. People looked at us and called us "saints" for adopting "such a challenging boy." We felt demeaned and demoralized, but still determined to love and care for our little boy.

UPLIFT became a safe haven for us. No one blamed us for his outbursts, but instead staff helped us learn how to cope with them. We learned from them how to protect our son at school, how to stop adults from bullying him because he was different, how to get

our families to stop offering unsolicited (and often ignorant) advice. We made mistakes, but UPLIFT was there when we needed to figure out a new approach for Anthony. They understood that there was no magical road map to emotional health. Sometimes a family has to go through trial and error.

The greatest gift UPLIFT gave us was removing that sense of isolation. When the children's mental health conference came around, attending a session with a parent panel changed my life. We weren't alone. Other parents were struggling through the same battles. Others felt as isolated as we did. I felt normal for the first time in years.

If I could send a hug out daily to the UPLIFT staff, I would. I never imagined I'd have a child with so many emotional and behavioral challenges to overcome. I never imagined I'd be so sad, worried, and heartbroken watching my son try to navigate life with the burdens he carries. UPLIFT prepared us for the struggles we face as a family, and gave us the tools we need to search for options and make hard decisions for him and for ourselves. We're grateful. We are no longer isolated and broken. We've found a variety of supports, taught our families about his unique challenges, and learned to advocate for our son educationally and legally. Some marriages don't survive this kind of challenge, but with all the right supports, ours has weathered each and every storm. We're blessed in more ways than we can imagine. And we love UPLIFT like family.