

National Adoption Month

## ‘Do it for the kids’

Kay Luna | Posted: Tuesday, November 17, 2009 2:00 am

Humming and jibber-jabbering to herself like a typical 2-year-old, the blonde-haired girl holds a calculator up to her ear like a cell phone.

Then, with her blue eyes sparkling, she toddles over and climbs up on the couch, clutching a dry-erase board and a black marker in her hands.

She wants to show Mommy her scribbles.

“That’s very pretty,”

40-year-old Michelle Krieger of Davenport tells her 2-year-old daughter, Ashlin Neveah — which is “heaven” spelled backwards.

And from where they sit in their toy-filled living room, with fingerprint-smudged windows facing the Red Hawk Golf Course, this is heaven on Earth.

Two people, both of whom lost their mothers, now have each other to love.

Foster care and adoption brought them together.

### Children need homes of all kinds

In honor of November’s status as National Adoption Month, social service workers throughout the Quad-Cities are urging families to consider becoming foster or adoptive parents to needy children.

Most children in foster care have been abused or neglected, and they usually have been removed from their homes. The goal is to reunite them with their biological families, whenever possible, but that isn’t always the case, said Amy Juhnke, the communications director for Iowa KidsNet.

In Iowa, KidsNet works with the Department of Human Services to match children who need foster or adoptive homes with families who (most likely) will be a good fit, she said. This service makes it easy to see, through a database, what types of families are needed most in specific areas of the state, she said.

The Davenport service area, a region of seven counties in southeast Iowa, especially needs more Hispanic and African-American families to take in children. They also are looking for more families willing to foster sibling groups, teenagers and children with disabilities, Juhnke said.

The Illinois Quad-Cities needs the same kind of help, said Doria Schneider, Illinois foster care and adoption specialist for Bethany for Children & Families in Moline. She said any people with good parenting skills and strong values — especially those willing to keep children for an extended period of time while the courts work to help them reunite with their families — are needed.

Foster parents can be married or, like Krieger, single. They can be homeowners or renters. And they come from all religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and sexual orientations, Juhnke said.

“Do it for the kids,” she said.

### Never imagined this

When she was a little girl, Krieger always thought she would grow up, get married and have children someday.

The “grow up” and “get married” parts happened. But the marriage did not last, and she did not end up having children.

“I told myself, ‘If I turn 35 and don’t have a child of my own, I’m going to adopt,’ ” Krieger said.

True to her word, when she hit that milestone and remained single, she began working to obtain her foster and adoption licenses. But the timing to get a child was not right.

Her mother was sick with cancer. She kept putting off taking in children so she could care for her mother.

Then, during October 2006, at the age of 37, Krieger moved back in to be with her mother during her final days. She spent every moment possible with her, all the while dreaming of the day she could give her a grandchild.

Her mother died in December 2007. Krieger was 38.

“I was robbed,” she said of her loss. “My mother, she was phenomenal.”

To honor that bond, Krieger proceeded with her quest to become a mother herself. She finally received her first foster child the next spring.

In fact, she got two girls — both babies in diapers. One returned to her biological mother four months later.

The other baby was Ashlin, who was just 8 months old when she arrived at Krieger’s home in May 2008. She never left.

Ashlin officially became part of the family in May — exactly 365 days after her arrival — when Krieger adopted her. It was a joyous day, Krieger said, displaying photos from an adoption celebration.

“I’ve kept everything, the cards, everything,” she said. “She will always know she was adopted. I’m not her ‘Tummy Mommy,’ but I’ll always be her mom.”

Still, foster care and adoption have brought along challenges. Ashlin was drug-exposed in utero and developmentally delayed, but Krieger — a speech language pathologist at the Select Specialty Hospital in Davenport — has worked closely with her daughter and seen improvement, she said.

Meanwhile, Krieger recently fostered siblings, ages 7 and 5 years, who needed special attention. They have since moved to another home, but she still keeps in contact with them.

Watching her daughter push a little shopping cart around the room, Krieger said she is open to more foster children. And she would consider adoption again if she ever got the chance.

“Absolutely,” she said.