

Spotlight: Understanding the Complexities of Adopting an Older Child

# Adoption Today

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International and Transracial Adoption Resource  
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## Older Child Adoption

*Is it right for your family?*

## Adoption-Friendly Workplaces

Dave Thomas Foundation shares how employers can make a difference for adoptive families

## Loving Daisy

*One adoptive mom discovers the joy one special needs Chinese orphan brings to her family*

The story of my son's service dog, Chancer  
and how his message is being barked around the world.

# Adoption + Disability = Wonder

I would never consider myself “a dog whisperer,” after all, I had grown up living only with cats and considered myself the quintessential cat-person. So here I am channeling my son's service dog's voice through a newly published children's book. In former careers I was a copywriter, script writer and producer, so writing a book seemed logical. As an advocate for my adopted son who experiences Fetal Alcohol Syndrome along with a host of other developmental disabilities, it became clear that I needed to share our unique story. Being a child with an invisible disability is particularly challenging since children generally-speaking are not as forgiving as adults. Kids with unusual or quirky behaviors are quickly labeled and ostracized.

I believe that children can understand and manage difficult feelings and experiences when they are mentionable. Keeping “differences” a secret only alienates the person who is differently-abled and sets them up for failure as opposed to success. And since research suggests that building a circle of support or community for those living with disabilities strengthens the outcome for the individual... why wouldn't we want to inform others of our son's hidden disability? The fact that it is a dog providing the education makes it that much more fun and powerful.

The decision to obtain a service dog for Iyal rose out of frustration, heartache and the desire to find a way that Iyal could feel more grounded and anchored in acceptance. Four years after receiving Iyal's diagnosis of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome we were becoming more and more desperate to find effective interven-

tions. But even beyond the behaviors which were spinning out of control through enormous limbic rages — I was becoming increasingly worried about Iyal's diminishing self-esteem. He was living in a world where he most often heard, “No!” “Don't!” and “Stop!” — horribly damaging to an already fragile sense of self. It seemed like we, humans, were not capable of controlling our reflexes to try and contain Iyal. Our threshold for patience had plummeted. And while my husband and I love Iyal unconditionally, our responses to his meltdowns were becoming less and less respectful. We needed another living being to help Iyal help himself. Enter the dog, Chancer — the world's first certified FASD Assistance Dog.

What has changed since Iyal received Chancer in 2008? Everything. Iyal loves to tell people about Chancer and how he helps him. He is proud of his “brother.” Two weeks after obtaining Chancer, Iyal started to speak with multisyllabic words in complex sentences that revealed self-reflective thinking. This was a huge change for Iyal from the limited range of speech he had prior to Chancer. Through Chancer, Iyal was able to describe how he was feeling, labeling emotions appropriately. Before Chancer, Iyal didn't talk about having a disability. Now, he has become an amazing self-advocate for just a 13-year-old boy.

Iyal knows that when he is confused or things feel scary, he can always go to Chancer for a “Nuzzle.” His “boy” anchors him safely in a world that often feels tumultuous and stormy. I've also discovered that Chancer levels the playing field. Chancer's presence gives everyone in the immediate vicinity a safer

place to explore a new relationship. Scientists call this “social lubrication.” It's as though the warm-fuzziness of this huge fluffy canine somehow rubs off on Iyal — eliciting friendly advances from the children who zoom in on Chancer. Like “second-hand” goodness. Since Chancer is such a magnet, kids and adults are unabashedly drawn to him and that allows Iyal a better chance of real interaction and the possibility for friendship.

So why is our new book named “Nuzzle — love between a boy and his service dog?” “Nuzzle” is the command that Chancer was taught for behavior disruption. Behavior disruption is a term used by 4 Paws for Ability, where Chancer was trained. It describes how a service dog can redirect challenging behaviors in which a child engages. “Nuzzle” is actually a significant command because it means that Iyal needs kisses and calming from Chancer. Within the first six months of obtaining Chancer, we did not need to even give the verbal command, “Nuzzle” because Chancer could sense when Iyal was “losing it” and needed some support. Iyal literally would ask for Chancer to “Nuzzle” him when he was crying or upset. Chancer heals Iyal with love that is offered through his “Nuzzle.” The physical action is when Chancer comes over to Iyal and uses his muzzle to break apart Iyal's fiercely crossed arms folded over his chest. Chancer then has access to Iyal's face which he covers with licks and kisses for as long as Iyal needs. This can go on for as long as 15 minutes sometimes.



# Dog

By Donnie Kanter Winokur



Photo courtesy of Bill Simmons Photography

It seemed so appropriate to have the story told through Chancer's perspective. As an adult, I have found that Chancer's presence defines Iyal's space in public in a unique and inviting way. In a sense, Chancer legitimizes an invisible disability. The dog validates the child's experience — even if it appears like willful disobedience to others. When I can, I explain that what seems like non-compliance is actually non-competence. So it seemed crucial that the story unfold through Chancer's voice. Chancer functions as Iyal's ambassador to the world paving a path for communication and acceptance. While as Iyal's mom, I interpret the world to Iyal and Iyal to the world — Chancer helps Iyal navigate the environment by lowering Iyal's anxiety level.

We hope this book provides an opportunity for children and parents to talk about all

kinds of differences in a supportive manner. Children with special needs are often the victims of bullying and teasing because of their vulnerability. It's important that children who are neurotypical, understand that others with organic or acquired brain injury do not intentionally misbehave. The wiring in their brain is different and a damaged central nervous system can wreak havoc on an individual's ability to control their emotions and responses to their environment.

Hopefully Nuzzle can plant the seed that "acting out" or "falling apart" doesn't last forever nor should it be judged as bad behavior. All behavior is a form of communication. The language expressed between Chancer and Iyal is actually thousands of years old. It is tried and true. Their mutual love and respect is the purest kind of friendship I would want for my child.



*Donnie Kanter Winokur established NOFAS Georgia, the first state affiliate of the National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. In 2008, Donnie's son, Iyal, obtained the first certified FASD Assistance Dog in the world. Since then, she presents to international experts on the profound benefits of providing service dogs for children with FASDs and other "invisible disabilities." Her award-winning children's book; "Nuzzle – the love between a boy and his service dog" was published in 2011. This followed her 11-year old daughter's award-winning book, "My Invisible World – life with my brother, his disability and his service dog." For more information, write to [thechancerchronicles@gmail.com](mailto:thechancerchronicles@gmail.com) or call 770-856-5424.*

# Smoke Signals Before a Rage

by Jodee Kulp

**W**hen was the last time you felt “real fear?” Was it when you spun out on a road and did not connect with another car or stable object? Was it when the elevator made a jump on the way up or down? Remember that feeling? How long did you remain in alert? Now that you know the feeling — helpless in doing anything about the possibility of impending doom — imagine what your child with atypical behavior and social experiences faces each day.

Watch for your child becoming overwhelmed and notice subtle body changes. A rage response hijacks the mind and body and may even include a sense of relief or joy from the child as he or she releases pent up feelings. When a child is raging social perception, speech, judgment and motor behavior is weakened. The child may not be able to remember the facts of the event.

The following are some early smoke signals to help “before a rage” when you still have time to redirect, remove or change the environment in a situation.

## **When to expect smoke signals**

- School work they are unable to complete.
- Conversations they are unable to understand.
- Room temperature, lighting or scents they are unable to adjust.
- Feelings are hurt, self-esteem shattered or they are insulted.
- Unable to accomplish something.
- Another person persists in annoying them.
- Promises are broken.
- Personal belongings are removed or stolen.
- Sensory overloaded area.
- Pressed for time.

## **Watch for the smoke signals**

This is the time for calm or joyful redirection, refocus, patience and healthy humor.

- Muscle tension
- Loss of muscle tone suddenly

- Heart rate increase
- Face or ears flushed
- Goosebumps
- Trembling
- Blanching of face
- Breathing change
- Visual focus hard to sustain
- Deterioration of a task
- Crying
- Chewing on clothing

## **Some children shut down and others ramp up**

- **Shut down**
  - Shallow breathing
  - Rocking
  - Nodding head in agreement
  - Staring or glaze look
  - Voice volume decrease
  - Head lowered
- **Ramp up**
  - Rapid breathing
  - Shaking head in disagreement
  - Pacing or humming sound
  - Clenched fists
  - Head up
  - Voice volume increase

*Jodee Kulp is an award-winning author, illustrator, producer, and advocate who works tirelessly to serve children, families and adults living with the challenges of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). Her organization, Better Endings New Beginnings mission is to build sustainable lives for persons living with this disorder through education, compassion, and growth. Jodee provides international communication through stories to “inspire, build hope and provide wisdom to change the world one person at a time.”*



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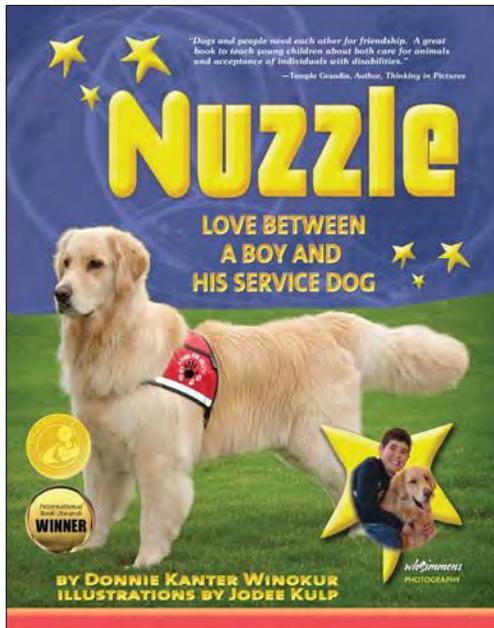
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**Nuzzle: Love  
Between a  
Boy and His  
Service Dog**

By Donnie  
Kanter Winokur  
Illustrations  
by Jodee Kulp  
CreateSpace,  
2011, ISBN-  
13: 978-  
1466411722,  
48 pages \$16.95

“Nuzzle: love between a boy and his service dog” is a book that can be read on many levels and by many ages. What looks like a children’s book is actually a profound story about the need to be loved, the need to be accepted, and the need to have a place in the world. It is a book about the strong connections that animals and humans have and ways that they can work together to make the world a more manageable and accessible place for individuals with disabilities.

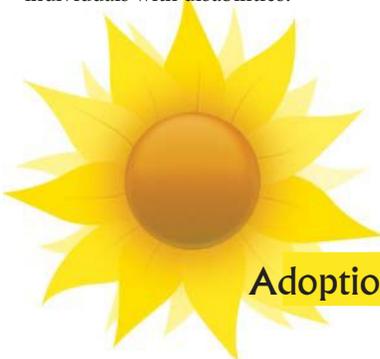


“Nuzzle” tells the story about a young boy living with fetal alcohol syndrome and his larger-than-life service dog, Chancer. We are fortunate that children today are growing up in a world which is more inclusive — one in which children with disabilities are educated alongside their typically developing peers. Sometimes children and adults with disabilities need assistance to learn and integrate more fully. While this can take the form of a Braille reader or augmentative communication device, for some children and adults the assistance they need is from a service dog. Nuzzle provides a glimpse into how the dog and the people they support are so perfectly matched, and more importantly describes the significant and deep relationship between the two. Sometimes a service dog, like Chancer, is the key to opening doors that were previously closed. Through Chancer’s understanding of his boy, Iyal, children learn respect for differences.

Gently, the story weaves together the idea of rescuing and being rescued and how we all can offer hope to one another.

Children, their parents and educators will love “Nuzzle.” The words, style and art work are child-centric. On a more important level, children and adults will gain an understanding of fetal alcohol syndrome, its impact, and the important role that service dogs can have in the lives of people with disabilities. I look forward to reading this book to my grandchildren, and sharing it with co-workers, family, and friends.

— Eve Bogan, Director, Tools for Independence Disabilities Services Division, Jewish Family & Career Services, Atlanta, Georgia



## Kacy Ames-Heron, LCSW

Adoption Consultation and Therapy for Individuals, Couples and Families

*Kacy is a psychotherapist in New York City who specializes in working with themes of adoption including issues around identity, loss, grief, control, multiculturalism and attachment. Kacy provides a free phone consultation. Call or email for a consultation or for more information about her practice.*

255 West 101st Street, 1st Floor  
New York, NY 10025

917-279-2144

amesherontherapy@gmail.com