

Homeschooling Special Needs:

School for Us is Repetition by Leanna Getty

Ken and Linda Bienert are parents of four biological daughters, all grown and away from home, and three adopted children. Andrew who is 13, Bailey 9, and Zachary 8, are victims of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), which is known to be an invisible disability.

The Bienerts first discussed adoption when their daughters were younger and being taught at home. Due to financial reasons, the option of global adoption was dismissed. Years passed and, after taking into consideration the idea of going overseas to serve in children's homes in India, the couple decided on local adoption right at home in Alberta.

Since they had all the provisions for a daughter, the couple requested information about adopting a single girl. Realizing that they were soon to be empty nesters and to take on a lone girl would make her an only child, Ken and Linda offered to adopt a group of siblings.

School for them is repetition, explanation, and concentration on life's vital skills.

In December, they were matched with three siblings. Challenges arose over the fact that Ken and Linda wanted to homeschool. These parents agreed that if they were not allowed to homeschool all three children, they would not adopt them. This condition was finally accepted and the children were welcomed into their new home February 2008. Within the next few weeks, Ken and Linda discovered that mental challenges were evident in all three, and tests were undergone in order to determine a diagnosis.

Not knowing where to begin with their new adoptees, Ken and Linda started the children off with cardboard books and began filling in the gaps left behind from the children's neglectful upbringing. Linda discovered that she would have to treat the children as toddlers and teach them the basics, such as how to play, what a toaster was, and how to bake a cake.

One thing Ken and Linda have always encouraged is the memorization of Bible verses, but when it came to reading, the children took each word or expression literally without actually putting all the words together. For example, when Bailey read about David from the Bible and how he had the heart of a servant, she could not understand how David could actually have someone else's heart!

The couple discovered that ordinary life skills, such as crossing a street, have to be reinforced repetitively. Cause and effect has to be explained almost daily. They are very concrete thinkers, and there are no exceptions to rules in their reasoning. When new family members and friends come to visit, the Bienerts have to explain that limits have been put in place and that, if certain situations arise, the adults around the children must act as their external brains, reminding them of rules and behavioral issues.

Early on, Linda understood that because of the children's pre-natal damage, there was a continual need for supervision and structure, or more challenges would arise. That is when Ken and Linda contacted HSLDA.

As Linda faces the challenge that the children are not even aware of their own lack of comprehension for what they read or hear, she has learned to filter out what is useless to them to focus in on life skills. This requires repetition, explanation, and concentration for those vital life skills. She knows she can only push the children, especially Andrew who has chromosomal as well as other developmental challenges besides FASD, as far as their mental abilities will allow. By continuing to homeschool, Ken and Linda know that they are providing their adopted children with more than any school system possibly could. 🏠

Recommended reading:

- *Damaged Angels* by Bonnie Buxton
- *The Real Brain Drain* found at www.paulszabo.com