

## *Children for Adoption with Special Needs*

### ■ Older Children



The greatest number of the children who need adoptive homes are eight years old and older. Older children are more likely to have been abused physically, emotionally, sexually and carry the scars from their past experiences. Many have had to leave families after developing deep emotional bonds. They may have been in more than one foster home.

Multiple placements can interfere with a child's ability to bond and trust. They are people with opinions, feelings and values, both good and bad. But most people change over time, even after they are adults. Most people are not the same now as they were five, 10, 15 years ago. So, too, do the children change over time. With a family they can call their very own, they learn to trust and to form lasting attachments. Strengths to consider in parenting are:

- An understanding that the child has thoughts and feelings that must be heard and respected
- An understanding of the normal developmental stages, particularly adolescence, and the impact it may add to being an adopted child
- An ability to respect and accept the child's past parenting relationships

### ■ Sibling Groups



Siblings have the right and need to be placed together. Siblings separated from each other often experience a greater sense of loss than when they are separated from parents. Some children have actually spent a longer portion of their lives with siblings than with parents. In the crisis of shifting from one environment to another, the presence of a sibling can be reassuring in a frightening situation. Siblings tend to keep each

other busy, often reducing demands on parents to provide time-filling activities. The older child in a large sibling group needs to be given a chance to be a child because they have often had to be a parent for their siblings. However, the role they have played as substitute parent must be respected.

Strengths to consider in parenting are:

- Experience with large families (either as a member of a large family or parenting four or more children)
- A strong support system such as family members, friends, community

## ■ Developmentally Disabled



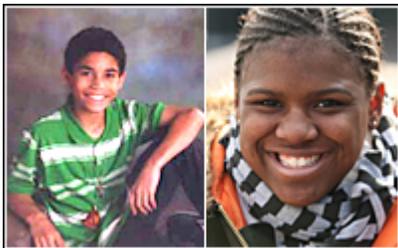
Some of Virginia's children who now await homes and families have physical and mental disabilities. These disabilities range from mild short-term disorders to serious life-threatening illnesses. It may be a child with a correctable or permanent heart defect, a child with an orthopedic problem or a congenital deformity. The child may have cerebral palsy, epilepsy, a neurological condition, be mentally retarded or have a learning disability. Some children have more than one disability. Even children who have terminal illnesses need families who will love and care for them for as long as they live.

Strengths to consider in parenting are:

- Ability to give extra patience and love to children who need vast amounts of time and care
- ability to see a child's strengths, rather than the limitations
- ability to see even small steps as major progress
- Being realistic about the child's abilities

These young people have opinions, feelings and values, both good and bad. Many adults are not the same today as they were five, 10, 15 years ago. Children, also can change over time.

## ■ African-American & Biracial Children



More than half of the children in Virginia in need of adoptive homes are children of African-American heritage. The African-American community historically has adopted children informally. They have opened their homes and their hearts to extended family members and children in their own communities. Today, however, our communities have expanded greatly and our communities are more temporary. Neighbors do not know each other as well, and relatives are not geographically close. When family problems arise, it is more difficult to seek assistance from extended family members because of these distances. Frequently, the children from these situations come into the formal system of foster care.