

Kids travel abroad to find forever home

Summer Miracles program aims to bring adoptive families, Colombian children together

By Ken Knutson

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Every child needs a family. That's the mantra of Kidsave International, an organization that helps Colombian orphans and foster children ages 8-14 find adoptive families in the U.S. through its five-week Summer Miracles host family program.

The Burt family of Hinsdale welcomed Johan, 11, into their home June 28. This is Johan's second stay through the program, and Tripti and Dave Burt are optimistic that their first time hosting will make a difference.

"(Johan) is one of the few kids that was here last year and didn't find a family," Tripti said. "He's a darling boy."

Kidsave staff, volunteers and families gathered June 30 at Fullersburg Woods in Oak Brook to welcome this year's three Chicago-area host children, take a hike and enjoy a cookout. Events are planned each weekend during their stay to both facilitate fun and provide a chance for prospective adoptive families to meet the kids.

Maru Braemer, founder of and volunteer coordinator for the Chicago chapter of Kidsave, said the goal is to turn the short-term visit into a permanent placement.

"At the end of the day, around 85 percent of the kids find families," Braemer stated, noting that securing host families is integral to the program's

success. "The host families are hosting, sometimes, with the hope to adopt. And there are other families that are hosting with the hope to advocate."

The Burts, who have four school-age children, are in the latter category.

"Dave and I decided to host this year and hopefully get more families to start hosting in the Chicago area," said Tripti.

Both physicians, they leveraged their network of medical professionals to spread the word.

"We're looking to create awareness by hosting," she said.

Their involvement with Kidsave was inspired by an extended family member who hosted through Kidsave's Washington, D.C., chapter and ended up adopting the child.

"When we heard her story, we were like, 'This is so great that you actually bring the children into the community and allow people to get to know the children,'" Tripti said. "I think it is a unique idea and that's why we've been attracted to it. It hits the heart and mind."

Although Johan's English is limited, the joy he exudes frolicking with other children on the steamy morning of the Fullersburg Woods event appeared unbounded. Asked if Colombia was this hot, he responded, "No tanto" — not so much.

Braemer said the program



The Burt family of Hinsdale — parents Tripti and Dave and their four children — are hosting 11-year-old Johan (far right) from Colombia this summer as part of Kidsave International's Summer Miracles program to find adoptive families in the U.S. for older children from Colombian orphanages and foster homes. (Jim Slonoff photo)

works with older children because "they have little or no chance of finding adoptive parents in their own country."

"The program especially helps older kids that people are not necessarily looking to adopt," she added.

Tripti's sister, Neena Will, lives in her Clarendon Hills with her family, also strong Kidsave proponents. Between the Burts' four children and Will's four sons, Johan has an

abundance of playmates.

"It's a natural fit," Tripti said. She expects the experience to profoundly impact her family along with their friends and neighbors, she remarked.

"I'm looking forward to watching our own children open their hearts to him and watching our community open their hearts to the concept and helping, not only Johan, but all three children find permanent homes," Tripti

said.

And what is Johan most excited about?

"Playing with water balloons," he replied in Spanish.

Another Kidsave meet-the-kids picnic will be held from noon to 3 p.m. Saturday, July 14, at Denning Park, 4903 Willow Springs Road, La Grange. The children return to Colombia Aug. 3. More information is available at kidsave.org/summer-miracles-events.

D86 hires experienced administrator for post

The Hinsdale High School District 86 Board Monday approved the appointment of Carol Baker as assistant superintendent for academics/chief academic officer, effective Aug. 1. She replaces Pam Bylsma, who will retire at the end of October.

Baker currently is the superintendent of Lyons Elementary District 103. Before that, she served as the director of curriculum for science and music for Community High School District 218 in Oak Lawn, where she began her career teaching high school physics and earth science for 18 years.

"I am thrilled to join District 86 as the next leader of curriculum and instruction," Baker said. "Its reputation as a district of academic excellence attracts families to the community as well as staff, and that well-deserved reputation is the result of hard work."

Superintendent Bruce Law said Baker brings an impressive depth of knowledge and leadership skills to the district.

"She understands curriculum as a former teacher and as an administrator, she has been on the forefront of the development and implementation of more rigorous academic standards used nationwide and she understands the important work of assessment," he said.

"The fact that she has served in so many roles, including that of superintendent and board member, means that she will have a comprehensive perspective on the many complexities and opportunities involved in continuing the great work we have accomplished in District 86," Law said.

In District 103, Baker focused on aligning curriculum in math and English-language arts to the Common Core and oversaw expanding the use of Chromebooks. During her 10 years as an administrator in District 218, she led the science department in implementing Next Generation Science Standards and oversaw the building of



Baker

the state-of-the-art science wing at Alan B. Shepard High School. She also worked with the staff to rebuild the Eisenhower High School music program and created new music courses at all three schools.

She has served on the national writing team for the NGSS, as president of the Illinois Science Teachers Association (2011-13) and as a Consolidated High School District 230 Board member (2009-13).

Baker received her bachelor's degree in physics from Loyola University Chicago. She has a master's in educational administration (K-12) from Governors State University and a doctorate in educational leadership (K-12) from National Louis University.

She will earn \$167,515.