

Parents of adopted child seek to help him learn his blended heritage

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ROUND ROCK—A family's heritage can be a great source of pride—something parents carefully pass down to children so they know and embrace their culture.

But adoptive parents of children with mixed ethnic heritage face special challenges.

Eighteen-month-old Milo, handsome and energetic with a sparkling smile, is one-half Hispanic, one-fourth Anglo and one-fourth African-American.

His adoptive parents, Jaime and Renee Baeza of Leander, are Hispanic. One expression of their unconditional love for him involves helping him learn about his blended heritage.

The Baezas have served two years as foster parents with STARRY, a [Children at Heart Ministries](#) program, and they have been eager to adopt.

Jaime and Renee Baeza of Leander are seeking to instill in their adopted son, Milo, an appreciation for this mixed Anglo, Hispanic and African-American heritage. (Children at Heart Ministries Photo)

“We just wanted a child,” Mrs. Baeza said. “Race didn’t matter. A child is a child.”

In May 2008, when they were chosen from hundreds of applicants to be the parents of a mixed-race boy, they eagerly took on the challenges that come with raising a multi-racial child.

“We want Milo to know his cultures and his customs so he can know his background,” Mrs. Baeza noted. “But we also want him to be diverse and appreciate all cultures. We want him to be well-rounded and accepting of everyone.”

The Baezas are bilingual and already are starting to teach their son both Spanish and English. Their support system includes African-American and Anglo relatives in their extended family and close friends from varied ethnic backgrounds. Through interacting with family and friends and participating in family events, the Baezas believe Milo will grow to embrace all aspects of his culture.

Also, cultural competence is taught in training at STARRY and throughout the foster parent process.

“If adoptive parents do not have their adoptive child’s culture in their family, cultural exposure can be incorporated many other ways,” STARRY Foster Care Program Supervisor Jillian Tappan noted. “Reading historical and cultural books or watching movies will assist in incorporating an adoptive child’s culture into their family.”

In addition, both parents and children can take this opportunity to bond while they are learning. It is important to give a child the opportunity to ask questions and set out to find the answers together, Tappan stressed.

Although the Baezas had a passion for African-American culture and already were familiar with it, they have discovered many helpful tips and

ideas through reading—a never-ending process of continuing education for the adoptive parents. They plan to continue to learn about Milo’s culture as he grows.

The Baezas also plan to continue exposing their son to varied cultures in his day care, church and community. In day care, for instance, Milo plays with peers of different races.

“A child’s heritage is a large piece of who he or she is,” Tappan said. “All children should be given the opportunity to embrace and be proud of their heritage, whether they grow in their parents’ belly or their adoptive parents’ hearts.”