American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

We Are Family: American team members share personal adoption stories

2/9/2018

Parents who adopt their children often face significant financial commitments just to complete the process. To help our team members with adoption-related expenses, American Airlines launched an adoption assistance program for U.S.-based mainline team members at the beginning of 2017, and recently expanded the benefit to all international team members. Along with financial reimbursements up to $4,000 to cover court costs and attorney fees, team members can also receive two roundtrip tickets if they need to travel to take custody of their new family member.

Over the past year, more than 15 team members have utilized the program. Their personal stories are touching and emotional … and illustrate why we are working to support the many types of parents in our workforce with their family planning needs. These are two of those stories.

Left: Xiu Xiu's adoption day in China Right: Xiu Xiu in July 2017

Capt. Tony Robinson, ORD

My wife, Sharlavan, and I have five children - three adopted and two biological. Two of our adopted daughters are from the same orphanage in China. Ten years ago, we took our oldest Chinese daughter, Mikaela, to China to allow her to experience the culture of her birth country. While visiting her orphanage in the city of Juijiang, we noticed a 3-year-old girl who seemed quite shy. She was considered a child with special needs because she had congenital cataracts, but was very cute and we couldn't understand why she wasn't being considered for adoption at that time. We tried to help by offering to facilitate the necessary surgery to remove

the cataracts and even tried to adopt her at that time but could not due to existing adoption regulations.

Fast forward nine years. Our oldest biological daughter calls my wife one morning and tells her to check out this cute little girl who has congenital cataracts and is available for adoption. She is also from the same orphanage as Mikaela. We followed up and discovered it was the same girl from nine years earlier.

After much prayer, soul searching (and about 10 months of paperwork) we boarded a flight to Shanghai on the first leg of our journey to adopt Xiu Xiu. After a fast-paced, two-week journey, we returned home with Xiu Xiu from Hong Kong.

Due to the timing of our adoption, we were one of the first families to enjoy American's new benefit. Adoption can be an expensive, time-consuming and an intimidating undertaking, and we can't say thank you enough to the ORD Flight office and ORD chief pilots who supported us throughout this process.

Xiu Xiu, now 13, has been a part of our family for almost a year and has adjusted very well. She speaks very good English and attends sixth grade at our local middle school. She has had two eye surgeries and will need additional surgeries to help with her vision impairment but she is happy and excited about the future.

Left: Eli's adoption day Right: Eli boarding his first American Airlines flight

Yesenia Sidwell, analyst, Cargo Revenue Management
My husband and I have two children. It had taken us some time to get pregnant with our second child so knowing that we wanted a large family, we began to consider adoption. Initially we were concerned that it was going to be an incredibly difficult and long experience. But, the best way to describe our journey is "meant to be."

On Mother's Day in 2016, my family attended church and the sermon was on parenting an adopted child. And as it happens, ACH Child and Family Services (based in Tarrant County, Texas) was on-site to share more information on the adoption process. That same week, there was a seminar on how to use your benefits for adoption at HDQ. See what I said about it being "meant to be?"

By the next Monday, we had submitted our application and by Thursday we had our first interview. Over the summer we completed our training and observation, so that by December we were matched with Eli, who was in foster care.

He came home with us in February. In fact, I was on leave at home with Eli when American announced the

new adoption assistance program. We were thrilled to hear the news! The assistance really came into play on Eli's official adoption day in August; it couldn't have been easier. We turned in our receipts and forms and were reimbursed within two weeks.

When Eli came home with us, he had previously been in a Spanish-speaking foster home and primarily spoke Spanish. Luckily, I speak Spanish so I could bridge the gap but he now is speaking very good English. And when he first came home, he had tremendous separation anxiety and difficulty playing with children his own age. But, we're very happy to report that he's adjusting well and doing well in his forever home.

Eli has been the perfect addition to our family and we're excited to start the adoption process again this year.