



**Our Mission:** To provide comprehensive family-centered resources that bring hope and healing to children, youth and families across Nebraska in a compassionate and caring manner.

**Our Vision:** A world where families have a clear pathway to the resources they truly need to lead healthier, more hopeful lives.

## **April is Autism Awareness Month: Building Understanding, Compassion, and Support**

April is recognized as Autism Awareness Month, a time dedicated to increasing understanding, acceptance, and support for individuals on the autism spectrum and their families. At Epworth Family Resources, we believe that every child and family deserves compassion, respect, and the opportunity to thrive. This month offers a meaningful reminder of how we can all play a role in creating a more inclusive and supportive community.



### **What is Autism?**

Autism, or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a developmental condition that affects how a person communicates, interacts socially, and experiences the world around them. It is called a “spectrum” because it presents differently in each individual. Some people with autism may need significant support in their daily lives, while others may live independently and have unique strengths and talents.

Common characteristics of autism can include differences in communication, challenges with social interactions, repetitive behaviors, and sensory sensitivities (such as being more sensitive to sounds, lights, or textures). It’s important to remember that autism is not a limitation of potential, it is simply a different way of experiencing the world.

### **How to Interact with Someone Who Has Autism**

One of the most powerful things we can offer is understanding. Here are a few simple ways to foster positive interactions:

- Be patient. Communication may look different. Give individuals time to process and respond.
- Use clear and simple language. Avoid sarcasm or figurative language that may be confusing.
- Respect personal space and boundaries. Sensory sensitivities may make certain environments or interactions overwhelming.
- Follow their lead. Engage in activities they enjoy and show interest in their strengths.
- Avoid assumptions. Every person with autism is unique, what works for one may not work for another.

Above all, treat individuals with autism with the same kindness, dignity, and respect you would offer anyone else.

### **Supporting Families and Children Affected by Autism**

Families navigating autism often experience both incredible joys and unique challenges. Your support can make a meaningful difference:

- Offer understanding, not judgment. Parenting a child with autism can look different, and that’s okay.
- Be flexible and inclusive. Invite families to events and consider accommodations that make participation easier.
- Educate yourself. Learning more about autism helps create a more accepting environment for everyone.
- Offer practical help. Simple gestures, like providing a meal, offering childcare, or lending a listening ear, can go a long way.
- Celebrate strengths. Recognize and appreciate the unique abilities and perspectives individuals with autism bring to our communities.

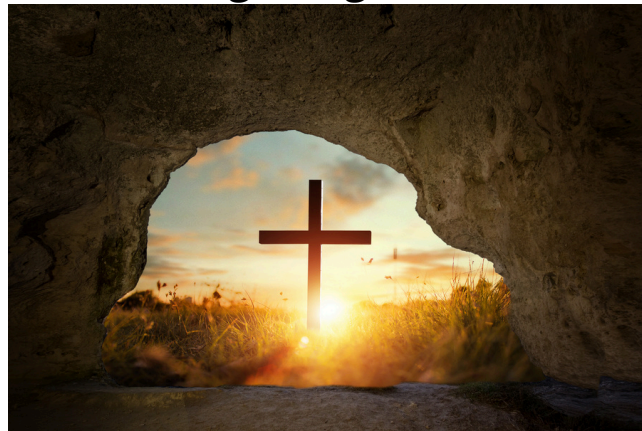
### **Moving from Awareness to Acceptance**

While awareness is important, the goal is acceptance and inclusion. By choosing patience, empathy, and openness, we can create a world where individuals with autism feel valued and supported.

This April, let’s commit to learning, growing, and embracing differences. Together, we can build stronger families and a more compassionate community, one where everyone belongs.

## **Reflecting on “The Empty Tomb”: A Message of Hope and New Beginnings**

As the season of Easter approaches, we are reminded of one of the most powerful and hope-filled moments in the Christian faith, the discovery of the empty tomb. What once symbolized loss, grief, and uncertainty became the very place where hope was restored, fear was replaced with joy, and a new beginning was made possible for all.



The miracle of the Resurrection is more than a historical or spiritual event, it is a message that continues to speak into our lives today. It reminds us that no matter how our circumstances may feel, no matter how lost or discouraged we become, there is always the possibility of renewal. The empty tomb represents a second chance, not just once, but again and again.

At Epworth Family Resources, this message of hope and new beginnings is at the heart of everything we do. Every day, we walk alongside children, youth, and families who may feel like they are in their own “dark” place, facing challenges, uncertainty, and pain. But just like the empty tomb, we believe that these moments do not define the end of their story.

Through compassion, support, and family-centered care, we strive to help those we serve find their own sense of renewal. Whether it’s a child finding stability in a foster home, a family rebuilding trust, or an individual discovering their strength again, these are the “resurrection moments” we are honored to witness every day.

The beauty of the Resurrection is that it doesn’t promise a life without hardship, but it does promise that hope is never lost. It invites us to believe in second chances, to extend grace to others, and to trust that healing and transformation are always possible.

As we reflect on the empty tomb this Easter season, may we carry that message of hope into our work, our relationships, and our community. And may we continue to be a place where new beginnings are not only possible, but celebrated.

Because at Epworth, every story matters, and every new beginning is a reminder that hope is alive.



**HAPPY**Work  
**ANNIVERSARY** 12-Rochelle Raymond, Human Resources



5-Crystal Kuklish, Family Life Specialist



## **Getting to Know Pete Dennis, Director of In-Home Family Services**

Epworth Family Resources is excited to welcome Pete Dennis as our new Director of In-Home Family Services. Pete brings with him not only years of experience, but a deep passion for serving children and families across Nebraska.

Born and raised in York, Nebraska, Pete graduated from York High School in 1978 and later from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in 1997. During his school years, he was actively involved in athletics, competing in cross country, wrestling, track, and baseball. Pete is also a proud two-time veteran, having served in both the Army and Navy.



Family is at the heart of everything Pete does. He and his wife, Melissa, have been fostering for more than 22 years. Together, they have adopted seven children and hold guardianship of four additional youth. His personal life reflects the same compassion and commitment he brings to his professional role.

Pete's passion runs deep in all aspects of his life. In 2013, after meeting the Hoffman family, he began wearing a Team Jack shirt daily to show support for pediatric brain cancer awareness, a commitment he has upheld every single day since. That same level of dedication is evident in his work with children and families, where he strives to create safe, stable, and loving environments.

Pete was inspired to enter this field through his own fostering journey, where he saw firsthand the challenges many families face, including trauma, addiction, and limited resources. This experience fueled his desire to help families find stability, healing, and hope.

When asked what he enjoys most about his work, Pete's answer is simple: making a difference. Whether at home caring for his children or in his professional role, his days are centered around supporting, loving, and uplifting others. He finds the greatest meaning in building strong relationships with families, creating trust, fostering partnerships, and witnessing the hope that grows from those connections.

Over the years, Pete has built lasting relationships with children and families, helping them understand their worth and providing the tools they need to succeed. His work is driven by a belief that every person matters and deserves care, compassion, and the opportunity to heal.

Outside of work, Pete enjoys spending time with family and friends and has a strong love for sports. His household is full of life, including Joey, a four-year-old border collie, and three cats, Willow, Marbles, and Slinky.

When reflecting on life, Pete shares that if he could have dinner with anyone, he would choose to spend that time with loved ones who have passed, cherishing one more opportunity to express how much they meant to him. It's a reflection of the deep value he places on relationships and connection.

Looking ahead, Pete's goals remain rooted in both family and service. Personally, he is committed to being present for his children, loving, teaching, and supporting them every day. Professionally, he aims to continue providing compassion and understanding to families navigating trauma, ensuring they feel seen, valued, and supported.

Pete stays motivated by the families he serves, their resilience, their desire to grow, and the opportunity to help them build the lives they deserve. His advice to others entering this field is heartfelt and encouraging: Never give up, believe in yourself, and don't be afraid to let others help you achieve your dreams. Together, there is nothing we can't accomplish.

We are truly blessed to have Pete as part of the Epworth team and look forward to the impact he will continue to make in the lives of children and families.

## **Closing One Chapter, Opening Another: Little Jewels Childcare Center**



After much thoughtful discussion, prayer, and consideration, the Epworth Board have made the decision to move forward with listing the building where Little Jewels Childcare and Enrichment Center was located for sale.

This decision did not come lightly. Little Jewels has been a meaningful part of Epworth's story, serving children, supporting families, and providing a nurturing, caring environment rooted in our mission. It has been a place filled with laughter, learning, and love, and we are deeply grateful for the staff, families, and supporters who have made it so special over the years.

Following the listing, we received strong interest from multiple parties. Ultimately, we received one formal offer. We are grateful for the interest shown, as it reflects the value and positive reputation Little Jewels has built within the community.

While it is never easy to close a chapter, we recognize that this step allows Epworth to focus more intentionally on our core mission, providing family-centered resources that bring hope and healing to children, youth, and families across Nebraska.

As we look ahead, we do so with gratitude for all that Little Jewels has been and optimism for what lies ahead. The heart of Epworth remains unchanged. Our commitment to serving families continues to grow, and we are excited about the opportunities to expand and strengthen our impact in new and meaningful ways.

Thank you to everyone who has been part of the Little Jewels journey. Your support, dedication, and care have made a lasting difference and that legacy will carry forward as we step into this next season together.

## **Every Foster Parent Has a Story**

Behind every foster parent is a story, one filled with compassion, courage, and a deep desire to make a difference. At Epworth Family Resources, we are honored to walk alongside 14 dedicated sets of foster parents, each bringing their own unique journey and heart to this important work.

No two stories are the same. For one family, their path to fostering came after learning they could not have biological children. Rather than giving up on their dream of growing a family, they chose to open their hearts and home in a different way. After completing training with Epworth, they became licensed foster parents, ready to provide love and stability to children in need. She, originally from Mexico and fluent in Spanish, and her husband, from Texas, bring not only cultural richness but also a deep sense of empathy and understanding to the children they care for.



Another family's journey began with a desire for something more, more support, more connection, and more purpose. After hearing positive experiences about Epworth's Foster Care Services team, they made the decision to transition and partner with an agency that truly values and supports its families. They were seeking a team that didn't just meet requirements, but one that genuinely cared and was invested in helping them grow into the best foster parents they could be. At Epworth, they found exactly that.

What connects all of our foster families is not just their willingness to open their homes, but their commitment to making a lasting difference in the lives of children. And what sets Epworth apart is the way our team walks alongside them every step of the way. Our Foster Care Services team is more than a resource, they are a support system. They are there not only for routine visits, but for the moments in between. They celebrate the successes, help navigate the challenges, and provide encouragement when it's needed most. They build relationships rooted in trust, compassion, and a shared mission to bring hope and healing to children and families.

At Epworth, we truly care about each and every foster family we serve. Because when foster parents feel supported, children feel it too.

Every foster parent has a story and we are grateful to be a part of theirs.

## Celebrating the Heart of Epworth: Our Volunteers

At Epworth Family Resources, we are continually reminded that the true strength of our mission comes from the compassion and generosity of our community. Our volunteers are the heart behind so much of what we do, and it is with deep gratitude that we recognize the many ways they give of themselves to support the children, youth, and families we serve.



Whether it's collecting essential items, organizing donation drives, or simply offering their time and talents, our volunteers make a meaningful difference every single day. From clothing and hygiene products to school supplies and comfort items, these thoughtful contributions help meet real, immediate needs and they send a powerful message to our families: you are seen, you are valued, and you are not alone.

We are especially thankful for those who step forward to organize collections in their churches, workplaces, and communities. These efforts not only provide vital resources, but they also raise awareness about the needs of children and families right here in Nebraska. Every item donated becomes part of a larger story of care and connection.

Equally impactful are the volunteers who give their time. Whether assisting with events, supporting staff, or offering encouragement to families, your presence brings hope and light into the lives of those we serve. You help create a welcoming and supportive environment where healing and growth can take place.

April is recognized as Volunteer Appreciation Month, a special time set aside to celebrate and honor the individuals who give so selflessly of their time and resources. It is an opportunity for us to pause and reflect on the incredible impact our volunteers have and to say a heartfelt thank you. While we are especially intentional in our gratitude during this month, the truth is that our appreciation extends far beyond April, your kindness and dedication are valued every single day of the year.

Because of you, Epworth is able to continue its mission of providing hope and healing in a compassionate and caring way. Your kindness ripples far beyond what can be measured, touching lives and strengthening families in lasting ways.

To each and every volunteer, thank you. Your generosity, your time, and your heart are truly making a difference.

### YOU COULD BE THE DIFFERENCE IN A CHILD'S LIFE Foster Parent Question & Answer Session

Saturday April 25 | 10:00 AM or Monday April 27 | 7:00 PM  
First United Methodist Church - Lower Level  
Enter through alley door.  
309 E. 7th St. York, NE

**No Commitment , Just Information**

**Come learn what fostering looks like, ask questions,  
and discover how you can help children and families in our community.**

**🎁 Attend and enter a drawing for a \$25 Casey's Gift Card! 🧑‍🎓 Childcare Provided**

**Can't make it? Scan the QR Code and a Foster Care Specialist will reach out to you.**

Contact us: 📞 402-362-3353 🌐 [www.epworthfamilyresources.org](http://www.epworthfamilyresources.org)

