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Lawyer knows adoption High school kids hear true-life story

BY WILLIAM CROYLE | WCROYLE@NKY.COM

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NEWPORT - Steve Feldmann of Cincinnati was put up for adoption at birth, but nobody wanted him. The right side of his face was deformed. He had a cleft lip.

He spent four years in an orphanage, then lived with a foster family in Arizona for two years. When they couldn't afford to keep him because of mounting medical bills, he was sent back to Cincinnati.

"I landed here and was an emotional mess," he said.

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Feldmann, 40, spoke Wednesday to a Family and Consumer Science class at Newport High School where students are learning about family choices. Feldmann was invited by teacher Susan Brindle to talk about adoption.

Feldmann talked about a young married couple who volunteered at St. Joseph Orphanage in Sharonville in the '70s and fell in love with him. He was 8 years old. Though they never planned to have children, they eventually adopted him.

"They sat me down and said 'Steve, we want you to be our son,'" Feldmann recalled. "I jumped up and down, I was so excited."

Feldmann had several surgeries to reconstruct his face. He got married in 1997 and has two children. He's a lawyer and board president of Healthy Visions, a Cincinnati nonprofit company that educates kids on how to have healthy lifestyles and relationships. He gives these talks through their Adoption Option school-based program.

"The two most important choices in my life were made by other people," Feldmann said. "The choice of my birth mother to place me for adoption was such a loving decision, as was the choice of my mom and dad to adopt me. Both decisions gave me hope."

Senior Tamara Sneed, 18, said she hasn't had a mom since she was 12 and her father has been in and out of her life. Her brother, she said, has basically raised her.

"I know what life is like without a mom and what an impact a mom can have on your life," Tamara said. "I've always wanted to adopt, myself. I wouldn't mind a disabled kid, either. They need love, too."

Senior Jacob Byrd, 18, has been raised by his grandparents. He agreed that adoption can be a great option.

"I thought everything he said was great," Jacob said. "I appreciated his honesty. I know that kind of stuff can be hard to talk about."

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