Enzo

(For Caregiver domain: Rate Karen and Daniel)

Enzo is a 15-year-old boy who is currently in foster care. Enzo is Latino, his mother is Puerto Rican and his father is Dominican. Enzo and his two siblings were removed from their parents due to serious neglect and placed in care six years ago because their parents both were substance abusers and involved in criminal activity; their parents’ rights were terminated two years later after they failed to comply with court-ordered drug treatment. Enzo’s older brother is 22 and is living independently; he visits with Enzo at least once each week. Enzo’s younger sister was adopted by a previous foster family and Enzo does not have any contact with her.

Until about one month ago, Enzo believed that his biological parents were dead. His older brother told Enzo and his sister this when parental rights were terminated, in an attempt to help the children heal and connect to their foster parents. During a visit last month, however, Enzo’s brother told him that their parents are alive and that Enzo’s mother is sober and would like to have contact with Enzo. Enzo and his brother are close, and Enzo feels some pressure to resume contact with his mother because of his brother’s wish to reunite their family.

Enzo currently lives with pre-adoptive foster parents, Karen and Daniel. He has lived with them since being discharged from a residential treatment center two years ago. Prior to this foster home placement, Enzo was in several different foster homes, was admitted to inpatient psychiatric hospitals three times, and ultimately placed in a residential treatment center for stabilization. Enzo’s placements were disrupted by – and his inpatient admissions precipitated by – severe oppositional behaviors, anger control issues, and incidents with foster parents and peers that included physical violence. He did well with his current foster family until recently, however, and was doing well in school, behaving at home, and had expressed his interest in being adopted by Karen and Daniel, who have long hoped to adopt Enzo.

Karen and Daniel both are first-generation Dominican Americans. They express that they care deeply for Enzo, and that it means a lot to them to be able to adopt a boy who is Dominican. They maintain strong, mutually supportive connections with other members of the Dominican community and have tried to teach Enzo about the importance of family in Dominican culture and about Dominican arts, cooking, and culture. Enzo has shown a great interest in these issues and regularly attends Dominico-American Society events with them. Up until this month, Enzo reported to his therapist that he strongly identified with Dominican culture and that he was glad he was going to be adopted by a Dominican-American family. About two weeks ago, Enzo became angry and postured aggressively toward a peer at one of the events and Board members gave him a warning about his behavior.

After he found out his mother was alive, Enzo began acting out. He has been staying out after school and coming home late and after the town curfew, refusing to do his homework or chores, being argumentative, and saying that he does not want to go to community events with his foster parents. On two occasions in the past two weeks, Enzo became so angry in response to being confronted about his homework that he threw his school books across the room. Last week, he told Karen and Daniel that he no longer wants them to adopt him and they should send him back to his mother. Karen and Daniel are very upset and somewhat stressed by Enzo’s statements; they have come to care deeply for Enzo and fear that his mother’s presence in his life will lead to them losing the boy. They are willing to do what it takes to help Enzo cope with his reactions but do not feel that he should have regular contact with his mother.

Enzo is currently placed in a specialized classroom because of his history of oppositional behaviors and poor peer relationships in school and a documented learning disability. Enzo was doing average work in this class, and behaving well with intensive support, until he found out about his mother. This month, he has stopped doing his homework and his classroom work, is failing all his tests and quizzes, and has been disruptive and disrespectful in class; his teachers are so frustrated with his behavior that they are not open to helping him. Last week, he got into a fight at school and was suspended; he now says he wants to drop out of school.

Enzo has shown a long-term interest in hip hop music. Despite his current stressors, he continues to enjoy hip hop. He sought out and attends an afterschool program at a local community center where professional musicians work with children and help them write and record their own songs. Enzo recently won first place in a competition for lyrics when he sang three of his own songs. Enzo continues to write and to rap at home, and says he thinks he may be able to become a famous rapper someday.