



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

MEET IVAN**

PERMANENT CONNECTIONS YMCA YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES

Ivan was 10 years old when he was abandoned at the US/Mexico Border by his biological mother. She left a note saying that an aunt was going to pick him up. A border patrol agent patiently waited with him for 6 hours. Nobody ever arrived. That was in 2016. It had been 1 ½ years since Ivan had first entered Child Protective Services. Eighteen months of disconnection from the only family he has ever known in Mexico. Five hundred and forty-seven days of being in the foster care system searching for answers.

OUR INVOLVEMENT

We received Ivan's case from San Diego County in March 2018. There was very minimal information on his biological family within his file: a handful of school records, a couple of phone numbers, and a genogram that didn't make sense - but it was a start. Juan, the Family Engagement Specialist assigned to Ivan's case, began combing through his file for clues that would lead him to anyone who would know about Ivan's past.

COLD CALLING

Juan started with the phone numbers and names on the genogram. He was often met with wrong numbers and disconnected lines. Buried in the file was a phone number that Juan had not tried yet. He dialed the number and a woman answered on the other line. This call leads to a firm biological connection to Ivan. She was the ex-wife of Ivan's uncle, the brother of his biological mother. At first, she was hesitant to provide contact information for his uncle. After many conversations with her, she eventually relented and Juan was able to contact Ivan's uncle in Tijuana. The uncle recalled meeting Ivan as a baby. Ivan actually used to live with his uncle until his mother abruptly took him away without any explanation. The uncle had lost touch with his sister many years ago as she had a criminal record for identity theft and drug trafficking. Upon further investigation, Juan discovered that there was an article in a Tijuana newspaper, possibly placed by Ivan's mother, claiming Ivan was missing.

A GODMOTHER

The uncle leads Juan to the strongest familial connection for Ivan- a godmother who lived in Salinas, CA. She also knew Ivan as a baby but lost contact with his mother. The godmother confirmed that Ivan is a US citizen and we were able to obtain his birth certificate. Over the summer, the godmother, her son who is a few years younger than Ivan, and Ivan were able to meet in person. The whole family instantly bonded and spent the whole day together. In the short amount of time, the godmother has become Ivan's strongest advocate. She is working to build a network of friends and extended family for Ivan to belong. She is happy to be in his life again and wants Ivan to know her. She told Ivan, "No matter what you decide, I will always be in your life." After hearing this, Ivan's social worker was able to expedite unsupervised visits with Ivan and his godmother.



FAMILY BONDS

Ivan's story is unique. The longer children are in foster care, the more difficult it can be to find the family. In six months of being part of our program, Ivan was able to connect with an uncle he didn't remember and form a special relationship with his godmother. Ivan speaks with his uncle regularly and the system is figuring out how to meet his uncle in person. Also, the godmother was able to confirm that Ivan's biological father is still alive. During a court hearing for establishing legal guardianship for Ivan, Ivan stated "I just want to be with somebody who loves me. I'm happy my godmother is here." As of today, Ivan's godmother is in the process of adopting him.

ABOUT YMCA PERMANENT CONNECTIONS PROGRAM

Our program helps families establish a lifetime network of support for children and youth who are disconnected from their biological family. Through a variety of services we:



- Support youth in developing a healthy sense of identity and maintaining connections to important aspects of their culture and community
- Enable young adults emerging from care to live safely and productively within their communities
- Increase connectedness, decrease dependence on the formal service system, and enhance family-driven decision making

To learn more about YMCA Permanent Connections, contact Charmaine Utz, cutz@ymca.org.

**At the Y, we respect everyone who comes to us to share their story – and many are working toward a fresh start in life. So while their stories are true, names and images have been changed to protect their privacy. **

