



Members of the Cullen family pose in their Sunday best. Left to right are: (Front Row) Tarah, Karah and Mia; (Back Row) Micah, Mark, Viola, Mark, Cheyanna, Katelynn and Makayla.

Eight Adoptive Children!

Pre-Retirement Couple Opts for Full House

After Raising Three Biological Children

First she made a 22-year career out of comforting people struggling through the end of their lives. Then Viola Cullen moved on to children struggling with their earliest years.

Starting as a home care aide working with terminal cancer patients, Viola loved her job until an injury forced her to retire. She has since turned her energies to fostering and adopting eight children, ranging in age from 2 to 15, through Montgomery County's Children Services Division.

Long after they raised their three biological children, the adoptive children have obviously created a full plate for Clayton residents Viola, 59, and husband Mark, 62. "This honestly wasn't what we had planned

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for our pre-retirement years, but we wouldn't change it for the world," Viola said.

"It's kind of a calling, and it has been very rewarding," Viola added. "That's why we continued – to make a difference in kids' lives. These kids literally had nobody. Most of them have had no contact with their birth families."

Half of the Cullen children were born with heroin or other opiates in their systems. There were also digestive issues, genetic defects, vision problems, asthma, ADHD, developmental delays and other issues. Viola credits her very understanding husband -- along with other supportive family and neighbors -- with providing a tremendous support network to get her children through extremely challenging times.

First came Micah and MaKayla, twins whose adoptions were finalized in March of 2002. They were the biological children of a relative who was unable to care for them, and four years later the Cullen's adopted the twins' younger sister, Cheyanna.

In November of 2009, Katelynn joined the Cullen clan through adoption. Then, a little over two years later, Mark and Viola adopted another pair of twins, Karah and Tarah, who were two months old when they joined the family as foster placements. Mia and Mark had different parents, but they both came to the Cullens at about five weeks old.

"Katelynn is probably the one who scared my husband the most," Viola said. "She was on oxygen for a year. She would stop breathing and he would freak out. You go to bed at night and check on them a dozen times in the night hoping they're OK."

"Adoption has brought our family tremendous rewards," Mark Cullen said. "We would do it again in a minute, and we don't have any regrets."

One of the Cullen children actually had to be "stepped down" with doses of methadone to combat withdrawal symptoms that came from the mother's prenatal drug usage. Montgomery County Children Services representatives helped with securing needed medical attention, and the agency also helped with financial assistance to ensure that these eight children found their forever family with the Cullen's.

To learn more about adoption with Montgomery County Children Services, call 224-KIDS (5437) or [click here](#).

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