

Meet the Kooyenga Family

While transitioning into the role of Wisconsin State Representative in 2010, Rep. Dale Kooyenga (R-Brookfield) had a memorable conversation with a friend about Safe Families for Children. This organization, he learned, was coordinating short-term housing for children in Wisconsin who may otherwise be living in an unsafe situation or absorbed into the foster care system.



Photo 1 : Dale, Jennifer and their children

Wisconsin families were opening their homes to children whose parents were dealing with difficult personal issues – perhaps while a single parent was seeking rehabilitation from an addiction or a new place to live. Through Safe Families, children are placed in a stable, loving home, which provides safety and consistency during an otherwise tumultuous time...but the state was shutting this program down because the state's power of attorney laws did not accommodate the program.

Dale began his tenure in the State Assembly by investigating the state laws impacting the operation of Safe Families. "I feel there's a sense of urgency here," said Dale in a [past interview](#) about the issue, "Children and families are already waiting for help." Dale became an advocate for child welfare issues and helped pass Assembly Bill 30, otherwise known as the Safe Families Act, in 2011, which changed a Wisconsin law related to the transfer of parental rights to a non-relative and allowed Safe Families to once again operate in Wisconsin.

Since his introduction to Safe Families, Dale has served as both a political advocate and a volunteer. Dale, his wife Jennifer, and their four children have opened their home to children who need a place to live and a stable family.

When asked about the greatest benefit or joy of being a host family, Dale replied, "It gives perspective. We have discussions about the needs of the people in our community. We talk about stereotypes and get insight into a different world. We remind our children of how blessed we are and how God commands us to share our blessings with others in need, especially children."

Dale and Jennifer embrace the productive discussions that often come up since their children are naturally inquisitive. Dale told a story about his 2-year-old daughter becoming "best buds" with a same-aged girl who stayed with them recently. He recounted their instant friendship and how they both grew as individuals during their time together.

"The greatest joy," he explained, "is knowing that loving and caring for children during this time changes and impacts an individual life."

"I'd like to think we're changing the world in a small way by being an example of a stable family," Dale said. "We eat dinner together and hold hands and sing a song before bed. I hope we're planting a seed of how a family supports each other in addition to providing physical security."

The Kooyenga family continues to support Safe Families through advocacy and opening their home, and they encourage others to get involved as well. "Everyone is busy," Dale said, "and there is never a perfect time to take on another child, so you just have to make it work. However, we always have plenty of food and a happy home where a child can find a safe place. I strongly encourage families to participate – the blessings flow both ways."



Photo 2 : Kooyenga children and their friend through Safe Families

Get Involved

Safe Family needs volunteers like you! If you're interested in learning more about Safe Families and discovering what involvement could look like for you, please visit milwaukee.safe-families.org/involvement and contact Heather Webb at hwebb@safefamilies.net

*Written by Stephanie Strang
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