



## Anna Caudill's Story (2013 Angel in Adoption® Honoree, TN)

***IN 2013, SHE GOT A CALL FROM CCAI THAT SHE KNEW WOULD CHANGE EVERYTHING.***



Anna and her husband traveled to China in 2008 to adopt their son, YoYo. They knew at the time that he had a rare birth disorder, and they were fully committed to helping him thrive in their loving home. When they went to bring YoYo back home, they also met a young man named FuXia, who Anna couldn't stop thinking about after they left. Two years later they would go back for Fu, a child who also had some physical and developmental disabilities. At the time, they leaned heavily on CCAI's partner Show Hope as a resource to assist them with the seemingly daunting but do-able decision to adopt two children

internationally who both had more medical, social, and educational needs than most children.

Due to the continual medical needs and comprehensive care both boys required, Anna chose to put her career on hold and put her energy into getting YoYo and Fu the medical care, physical therapy and education they so desperately needed. She helped transform Fu from a boy who they thought would never leave a wheelchair to one who can now walk with a walker. As educators, Anna and her husband fueled their passion to ensure all children not only have a basic right to a family, but also a basic right to an education. And through all of this, Anna learned an incredible amount about the rights that children are entitled to under the *Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act of 2004* (IDEA), which guarantees Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for ALL children with disabilities – including children who are adopted.

Early on, Anna and her husband knew they wanted to give back. There wasn't much she could do financially or time wise with the additional needs of their growing family, but they knew there was a way they could help others – by telling their story.

She started speaking at dinners and telling their story to anyone who would listen, using it to share her experiences and hopefully help others going through similar challenges. **In 2013, she got a call from CCAI that she knew would change everything; her Member of Congress, Marsha Blackburn, had nominated them to be an Angels in Adoption®.** One month later, they made the trip to Washington, D.C. The experience as an Angel in Adoption® with CCAI was life changing, and opened Anna's eyes to a fresh perspective on advocacy and post adoption services.

*“Angels in Adoption® gave me a practical sense of what advocacy looks like; boots on the ground, communicating with Members of Congress, how to structure a meeting, how to frame the conversation, how to narrow in on one piece of legislation at a time to focus advocacy efforts to increase results.”*

The Angels in Adoption® experience started to prime Anna’s thinking on how to advocate on adoption holistically. There’s the need for support and advocacy and the need for telling the story in a way that emphasizes the incredible need for every single child to have a family. She realized that as important as finding the family initially is, finding a place of hope and healing by equipping the family is critical to an adoption’s success.

### **AFTER ANGELS IN ADOPTION®**

After she returned home, her son started having problems in public school. While his teachers were cheering him on, they lacked familiarity with the educational, social, and emotional needs of internationally adopted children and children with special needs. Feeling charged from her experience with CCAI, she began asking friends and family on social media about educating internationally adopted children. She started to talk to the schools, and began advocating for her children in ways she previously had not feel empowered to do. She also went on to complete special education advocacy training at Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, and with the Council for Parent Attorneys and Advocates.

The response to her call for information was overwhelming, and she had parents contact her from 13 states. She realized there was a real, critical need for support and resources for families like hers. It was a need she knew she could serve, and because of CCAI, she now had some of the tools and confidence to execute it.

**Anna traces her founding of Post Adoption Learning Service (PALS), an organization based in Franklin, TN, which creates educational advocacy tools for families who have gone through the international adoption process, to her experience with CCAI’s Angels in Adoption® Program.** Anna’s journey to where she is today has been a remarkable one, marked by experiences in adoption, as well as parenting and educating adopted children with disabilities, and as a CCAI Angel that changed her life so tremendously that she chose to become an advocate and a resource for others adopting children internationally.

*“CCAI does an incredible job of connecting the dots for families with children who would otherwise view themselves as unconnected...CCAI is advocating for children, youth and families – including parents like me. They show them that they are not alone, and help them understand how to navigate Capitol Hill. CCAI provides a deep resource pool for those trying to affect positive change. They do an excellent job of equipping people for change. Because of CCAI I imagined myself as something more than “just a mom”.”*

