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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Stories of Caring School Leadership*. In this excerpt, an assistant principals story explains the importance of family support.

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88. Family Support

—Told by the assistant principal of a small-town elementary school

It was the start of a new school year, and I was sitting in the main office the week before teachers would report. Throughout the day, parents who had moved into the area over the summer would stop by to get their paperwork to enroll their children. Near the end of the day, Shelby came in with four children in tow. It was obvious that she was overwhelmed and was being pushed to her limit. We engaged in some small talk, and I learned that all of the children were her nieces and nephews and that she had temporary custody of them. Two of the children would be attending our school for the upcoming year—Matt and Laura.

After Shelby completed her paperwork, she asked if she could speak with me in private. We set up in the conference room beside the office where she almost immediately began to cry. She was struggling financially, as many of us would when four extra mouths were suddenly added to the family. But that wasn't what she was the most concerned about. She was most worried about how the children would be treated as they were African American and our student body was almost completely white. I did my best to assure her that her children would be cared for, loved, and protected just like all of our students. She did not seem completely convinced, but she could not afford to pay tuition for them to attend a nearby school that she would be more comfortable with. As she left that day, I committed to making sure I took extra time so that these children would feel welcomed and loved.

As the year progressed, Shelby's children did have a tough time adjusting. They had been

torn away from their birth parents and were now going to a school in which they saw themselves as outsiders. Their teachers and I continually poured love and grace onto them, but they couldn't help but still feel different from everyone else. Matt would often become angry and lash out at the students around him. Laura was overly concerned with how the students around her viewed her, and she often misconstrued their intentions.

As Christmas approached that year, I was speaking with Shelby about a small behavior problem with Matt when she confided that she wasn't sure what Christmas would look like for the kids that year. I let her know that someone had expressed a desire to help out one of our families and that I would contact that person and see if he could help. Shelby didn't know that this someone was me.

I waited until the next day to phone her so that she wouldn't guess my identity. My wife and I purchased Christmas gifts for all six of her children (she had two children of her own). We also took up money from our Sunday School class at church and gave her a gift card to spend on groceries. Members of our church began to think about how they could support this family in the coming year.

It has now been two years, and Matt and Laura are doing well. I know that Shelby trusts us and knows that whenever Matt and Laura come to our school they are coming to a place where they are loved and cared for. And our church played an important role in supporting this family.