

Adoption News



A Quarterly Newsletter from

Adoptions From The Heart

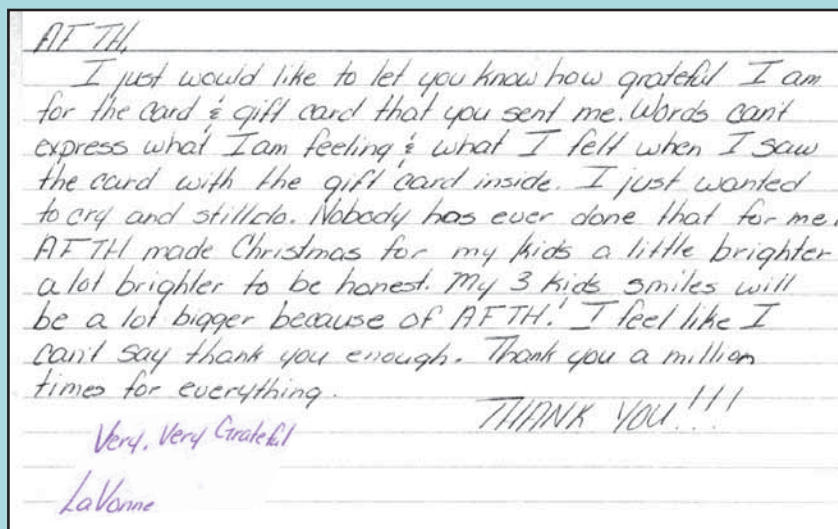
Winter 2012

AFTH Gifted \$13,525 to 39 Birthparents and 87 Children A Little Extra Help to Make the Holiday Season Bright

AFTH understands that birthparents' struggles don't just disappear once they make an adoption plan for their baby. Quite a few birthparents are also parenting other children and these continued struggles affect those children as well. In addition to ongoing counseling and post placement support, every year just before the holidays AFTH donates over \$10,000 in gift cards to birthparents with children in their home to help make the holiday season brighter. In the fall, social workers identify birthparents who are finding it difficult to make ends meet on a daily basis let alone finding room for something extra for their children during the holidays. This year, AFTH was able to help 39 birthmothers and 87 children with over \$13,000 in gift cards for food, clothing, and toys. Thank you to those who participated in AFTH's gift card drive by sending us gift cards. AFTH received \$650 in gift cards which were given to birthmothers for the holidays.

From just a few days after the gift cards were mailed, social workers have been receiving emails of gratitude and thank you notes from birthmothers who received gift cards. Many of whom tell us that without the gift card donations, they would not have been able to do anything special for their children during the holiday. One birthmother who is parenting three children met AFTH counselor Michaelina with a huge smile, a big hug and little candle her kids wanted her to have as a thank you to the agency and LaVonne in VA wrote this letter.

*AFTH made
Christmas for
my kids ... a
lot brighter! I
feel like I can't
say thank you
enough.*



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AFTH's First Annual Paper Hearts Project

National Adoption Month Campaign to Create Awareness about Adoption

Clients, adoption supporters and local small businesses joined in the Paper Heart Projects in November to show their support for National Adoption Month and AFTH. The Paper Hearts Projects was successful and raised \$700. We were touched to see such huge community support. For \$1 donation, paper hearts were displayed at AFTH offices and in participating stores to spread adoption awareness and raise funds for the agency's birthmother fund and special needs adoptions. A special thank you to all of you who supported the project this year!



The Coffee Buzz in Beaver, PA- Owners Dave & Linda Novak adopted two beautiful baby girls through the AFTH China program several years ago. Their local café, The Coffee Buzz, features the Pittsburgh area's most diverse line of coffee, tea, paninis, friendly service, and a relaxing atmosphere. We thank Dave & Linda for participating in the Paper Heart Project this year!

Mathnasium in Washington Township of Sewell, NJ - Bob and Kathie D'Orazio adopted their son through AFTH 23 years ago! They were thrilled to help in the Paper Heart Project and AFTH was thrilled to have their participation. Bob and Kathie own and operate Mathnasium, a learning center committed to helping children catch up, keep up, and get ahead in math.

Ice Cream Lab in Walnutport, PA- Cassidy Pitts, now 11, was adopted from China through AFTH. Cassidy played a huge role in promoting the fundraiser this year! The Ice Cream Lab is a unique sweet shop perfect for dessert with the family, parties, classes, fieldtrips, and catered events too. Thank you to Cassidy and her mother Wendy for all of their efforts to support our project this year.

Blondies in Catasauqua, PA- Rebecca Zukowski, "Blondie"- was wonderful in supporting the Paper Heart Project this year. "I think that it is important if anyone is in a position to help they should." Baked fresh every morning, Blondie's designer cupcakes are a local favorite. Blondies features extreme and quirky cupcakes, specialty hotdogs, nachos, and more.

LexaLu Essential Accessories at LexaLu.com- A fabulous niche website for organic and eco-friendly shopping. Visit LexaLu.com for bamboo kitchen accessories, soaps, spiritual jewelry, sport watches and more-they make great gifts! A special thank you to LexaLu for supporting our Paper Heart Project this year!



Klumy Moose in Chesapeake, VA- The boutique carries affordable, unique, high quality clothing, accessories, toys & great gifts. This is the ultimate destination for girls spa and party celebrations. Co-owner Amie Rigsby says the boutique helps many local non-profit projects throughout the year "We are very happy to be a part of this." And we are so thankful for their support!

Happy Tymes Family Fun in Warrington, PA- A Bucks County favorite, Happy Tymes is the perfect place to have some fun with the whole family...enjoy bowling, rides, arcade games, pizza and more. AFTH would like to thank Jon and everyone at Happy Tymes for their support this year!

Studio J.C. in Monroeville, PA- A full service hair salon located in the Pittsburgh area. We thank Studio J.C., supporters of adoption, and their clients for their help with our project this year!

Timeless Expressions Photo Studio in Greensburg, PA- Photographic services for families, events, weddings, students, sports, and pets. A personalized experience with talented photographers. Thank you to Timeless Expressions for their efforts this year!

Maniaci's Italian Bistro in Mohnton, PA- AFTH staff of Central PA visited the delicious Maniaci's Italian Bistro November 29 in support of our Paper Heart Project. Maniaci's is a family owned and operated full service Italian restaurant and bar celebrating 15 years. A special thank you to John & Susan and the whole Maniaci family!

To join the project in 2012, contact AlexandraP@afth.org.

They "Like" Us!



AFTH hosted a successful social media campaign for this November. In honor of National Adoption Month, our goal was to spread awareness for all things adoption. We enjoyed hearing stories, questions, feedback and your love for adoption. Throughout the month we hosted several contests and giveaways and will continue to do so. "Like" us on Facebook to join the fun and get connected to other adoption supporters like you.

www.facebook.com/AdoptionsFromTheHeart

A Letter from Maxine Chalker

Dear Friends:

Another year drawing to a close...this is our 26th year and it has really flown by! There is turmoil all around the country between the politicians and the economy but things at Adoptions From the Heart have remained steady. This past year, the agency placed 155 infants through domestic adoption and helped so many other families with their home studies for private and international adoption.

More and more people are finding AFTH through our website, blog or social media postings. Our Facebook fan page increases in fans daily and currently has over 1,130 fans following daily posts which aim at increasing awareness about the agency and adoption in general. We also have almost 200 Twitter followers and weekly posts on our blog help others to keep up on the latest news in adoption.

This Holiday season the agency again asked for gift card donations for the Birthmother fund. All the money received enabled us to donate to even more families than before. This year the gift cards, totaling \$13,525, for food, toys and clothing were given out at Christmas time to 39 birth parents and 87 children.

Our Heartbeats Program has experienced a few changes and has been more active recently. The Surrogacy in India Program has had four families apply, and we are excitedly awaiting the birth of the first baby as we received news that the first surrogate is indeed pregnant. The Embryo Program has been developed into a four-part online Embryo Educational Series, the only detailed webinar series of its kind, reasonably priced and highly recommended for family going through embryo placements. We hope to continue seeing growth in the Heartbeats Programs throughout the coming year.

Congratulations to all the new families created this past year and all the friends who continue to support AFTH's mission.

Warm Regards,



Maxine Chalker, MSW/LSW
 Founder & Executive Director

Please Make Your Checks Payable To: **Adoptions From The Heart**
mail with form to: 30-31 Hampstead Circle, Wynnewood, PA 19096

Also Accepting
 Online Donations:
www.afth.org



How would you like your donation to be used?

Use my gift to help birth mothers in the U.S. Use my gift where it's needed most.

\$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 Other \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

My employer has a matching gift program. Enclosed is the form.

AFTH is a registered, charitable organization. In accordance with PA law, we are required to advise you that a copy of our official registration and financial information may be obtained from either the PA Department of State by calling, toll-free within PA, (800) 732-0999, or the State of NJ by calling (201) 504-6215. Registration with the NY Attorney General does not imply endorsement. A financial statement is available upon written request from the VA State of Office of Consumer Affairs, (800) 552-9963 and from the CT Department of Consumer Protections by calling (860) 713-6170.



I'll Take The Thorn Bush

Funny thing about open adoptions. They're only open if everyone involved keeps 'em that way.

I've long opined in this space the merits of openness in adoption. I've professed from many a mountaintop that openness in adoption is not only a good thing, but a very good thing. Indeed, a *necessary* thing.

One could argue it's been easy for me to advocate this stance, given that my daughter was young, her birthmother enjoyed contact, joined us at the annual agency picnic and spent many an online session chatting about Maeve-specific happenings and the ordinariness of one's days. It is all good and easy until, well, all is not so good and not so easy. Then, it is just one short and slippery slope between championing open adoption and being its fair-weather friend.

What happens when your child's birthmother, whom you have loved from the moment you met – no, whom you have loved from the moment the vulnerabilities of the unfolding situation of placement took hold and you realized your life will forever be linked, in a huge and remarkably unbreakable way, to a woman you had yet to meet but whose baby was in your arms – suddenly steps back, and does so in large, giant strides?

What happens when conversations are quieted and shared bits of one another's lives become more about the brokenness of bits than the sharing itself? And with this new layer of loss in your child's life, fresh and confusing as it is wont to be, can you still champion not only the merits of open adoption but the necessity of it, as you once had?

Openness naysayers might find this The Opportune

Moment to say I told you so and issue a not-so-gentle scolding about how it would have been easier if the openness was never welcomed at all, if one had never invited such "confusion" and "drama" into their child's life. Bad mama! They may also make passing comments – and let's clarify, these comments do not "pass" easily – like "It's all for the better, anyway, she has you now" or, in a tone that suggests I should already have done the same, "Well, her birthmother has probably just moved on." (As if our daughter was simply a toy lost under the couch, collecting dust and easily forgotten after enough time has passed.)

These naysayers might, at least with good intention I hope, point out that my daughter is a bright-eyed, happy-spirited, adventurous, playful and brave girl, and they could argue we are doing just fine without the "unpredictability" – their word, not mine, uttered in a hushed tone – of a woman who could place her child for adoption, thankyouverymuch.

"We can complain because rose bushes have thorns, or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses."

They also could argue that if Maeve had never met her birthmother, B, outside the womb she wouldn't feel the need to know more about her now. They could propose that, if she didn't have that framed photo of her birthmother on her dresser, Maeve wouldn't think to ask, during that special cuddle time in bed just before the lights are turned off, whether B also had curly hair when she was her age, or if she could go to B's house to visit and play, or – and this one stings – if B is "still even alive."

I dig deep for patience when I find myself in conversations like these. I hear the arguments that, on the surface, are aimed to protect my daughter from pain and that I understand. After all, I hear Maeve's questions and feel for her an aching I wish I didn't have to feel, an aching I know will eventually make a home in her heart. With each question she poses, each observation she makes, each time she says – now with a formulaic lead-in that tips me off about what's to come – "Mommy, can I ask you something?" I know it is her heart speaking to me, a heart wrestling with something that's not quite right, sensing an aching that might find its way in, a heart I want to protect with all my Mama Might. (While proven for generations to be quite a powerful force, even Mama Might cannot keep a heart from feeling what it feels. This is, after all, what hearts were made to do.)

In these vulnerable moments that are tender to the touch, I have found myself asking, did I make this worse? In my attempts to lessen Maeve's loss by seeking openness have I actually set her up for more pain? If B returns, will the relief and happiness quickly become fear that she will leave again? Can we live our days with bated breath, in fear the rug underneath us will jerk away when we least expect it? Is it truly better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all?

And then, nearly as quickly as they came upon me, these vulnerable moments pass and I find myself back in the place I continue to believe is right and just and best for her. I continue to believe that in the end, all of this risk is worth all of the possible reward. I continue to believe, with all of my being, that having information – however incomplete it may turn out to be – is better than having nothing at all. And so I take myself off the hook.

I may struggle in a deafeningly silent conversation with a woman I will always love and worry about and care for and think of and wish so much for – *and from* – but I know in the depths of my being that my daughter's questions are not because I dared to expose her to the woman who created her. They are not because I dared to share her with the woman who nourished and grew her for the better part of a year. They are not because I dared to do my own bit of nourishing as well – in cultivating an authentic connection with the woman who, in a miraculous physical act that *only a mother can perform*, gave the final push that brought Maeve into this world.

Maeve's questions are not because we have saved for her handwritten notes from B, printed copies of shared e-mails and online chats, or because she has pictures of them together in the past. These keepsakes, remembrances and stories from their time together are tangibles from her unique beginning. They not only prove she was, and is, loved; perhaps they will prove to be the tools she needs in the future to decide how, or whether, to forge her own relationship with her birth family. Because of our commitment to openness, despite its unpredictability, Maeve has the full names, the colorful images – *the foundation* – upon which to build.

It seems to me that whether one stands squarely toward the bright sun, arms outstretched, declaring to the gods of openness that they are believers and will follow with a faithful heart or, if one decides during those early moments of new adoptive

parenthood to instead wrap their arms tightly around the new bundle, turn away from the light and declare this baby is mine all mine now go away and leave us alone, one thing is absolutely certain: The baby in either scenario will have questions. They will want to know things because they have lost things.

The mixed-up feelings and confusing questions come from being placed for adoption – not from seeing the face of the woman who gave them life, reading the letters of love from parents not parenting, being shown shared moments on film, or spending time in each other's company.

Sure, open adoptions are complex and full of nuances that can be difficult to decipher. Adoption itself is complex. Like all relationships, open adoptions require effort and the nitty-gritty that goes into any relationship worth fighting for. There is a sentiment attributed to Abraham Lincoln – far before open adoption theories came to be, of course! – that quite nicely fits our modern day: “We can complain because rose bushes have thorns, or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses.”

So it seems that Maeve will have to learn that rainbows require rainstorms and roses have thorns. She will discover that life is complex and often unfair, perhaps earlier than other children her age. She will also come to see, I hope, that we only know how pain feels because we also have known how happiness feels. One cannot exist without the other.

I must teach her – and remind myself – to ride the storm and look for the rainbow. That is having hope, and I refuse to live this life, or guide Maeve as she learns to live hers, without the prospect of hope. There is strength to be found here, of this I am convinced.

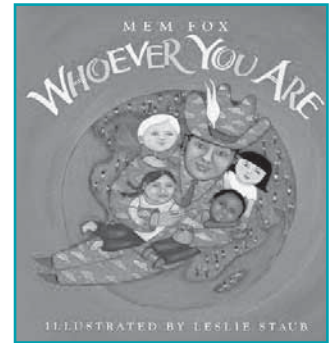
The door of Maeve's adoption may be closed for now, but the side we're standing on has no lock and no key – and as I have promised B, it never will.

Gretchen Boger-O'Bryan and her husband adopted Maeve through Adoptions From The Heart. A freelance writer and editor, Gretchen has written for numerous legal publications and websites, and also currently writes for a sister-run cupcake company. Being an everyday mom to Maeve, though, is what really puts the frosting on her cupcake. (Yep, she went there.) Gretchen pondered her first few years of motherhood and adoption on her blog, musings:mamahood&more, at mamagigi.wordpress.com.

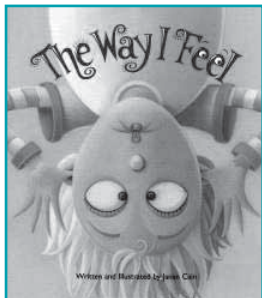
Book Reviews

Amazon.com gives AFTH a small donation from each book purchased through AFTH bookstore at www.afth.wordpress.com or order your books through AFTH online store at www.afth.org.

Whoever You Are (Reading Rainbow Books) by Mem Fox - A great book to teach acceptance of each other no matter what we look like. This multi-cultural book shares that all people no matter their color or the way they live are the same inside. We all love, cry and hurt the same. A fabulous book for all children.



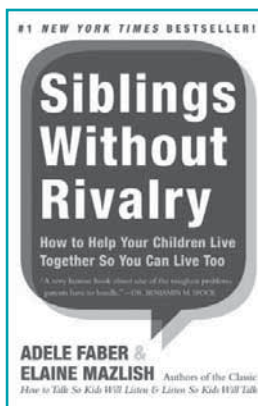
The Way I Feel by Janan Cain - This silly little book helps kids who have a hard time describing their feelings. Filled with



fun colorful illustrations each page describes a different emotion. Great for helping younger children identify their feelings. Book is also available as a board book shortened version.

Siblings Without Rivalry: How to Help Your Children Live Together So you Can Live Too by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish - The presentation of the

material revolves around stories straight out of a parenting classroom. With the vast number of issues and viewpoints coming from a multitude of parents, this style offers a wide range of advice to encompass many areas. The book also contains a number of illustrations showing children responding to good and bad methods. I'd venture to say if you only merely read the illustrations, these messages conveyed alone will give you ample insight to strengthen your parenting skills.



Congratulations to Families Who Have Recently Adopted!

Sons from the USA

David & Roblyn
Todd & Malila
Michael & Amanda
Marvin & Darla
Jeffrey & Christen
Jennifer
Thomas & Rosaline
Ryan & Julio
Mark
Mark & Loretta
John & Melissa
Vincent & Kathleen
Joseph & Dina
Jeffrey & Lara
Eric & Michael
Michael & Karen
Cori
Kevin & Amy
Ediberto & Constance

Daughters from the USA

Nicole & Colleen
Robert & Lori
Colleen
Ryan & Jennifer
Mary & Suzanne
Brett & Tivia
John & Linda
Michael & Erin
Denise
Todd & Erin
Mark & Daniel
Stuart & Stacey
Traci-Ann
Daniel & Meghan



AFTH Holiday Party Recap

Thank you to everyone who joined us in celebration this holiday season.

CENTRAL PA Central PA office had their annual holiday party on December 6. We had a great time with many families stopping by. We had a very special visitor when Santa arrived with special treats for the kids. It was great catching up with old and new faces. The kids enjoyed a craft project or two. This year we asked that families bring donations for the Water Street Mission and our families were more than generous. We took great pride in being able to assist those who need a helping hand this holiday season. A great time was had by all.



CONNECTICUT Over 100 people gathered together for the holidays. "Tom the Magician" entertained us with astounding feats of magic and Santa stopped by for a visit! Clients generously donated items for our drive to help the Elm City Women and Children's Center. The food was great and companionship was wonderful! A fantastic event to start the holiday season.



VIRGINIA The Virginia holiday party had 72 people in attendance with three birth parents reuniting with their children's families. The majority of those in attendance were



domestic families and even some waiting families. We had a couple of international clients join us as well. The pot luck meal was delicious. Santa made a surprise visit and the fun continued with goodie bags and door prizes.



ALLENTOWN The Allentown office held their annual Holiday Cookie Exchange Party on December 11th. Thank you to everyone that came out for an afternoon of holiday fun. Time was spent creating beautiful ginger bread houses, eating lots of cookies and finally being able to catch up on the past year. We look forward to seeing everyone again in December 2012.



CHERRY HILL The Cherry Hill office marked the holiday season with two social events, a holiday dinner party for birth families held on December 2 and an open house for adoptive parents held on December 7. The birth families enjoyed a meal that included chicken parmesan, pasta and holiday treats. The dinner provided an opportunity for the families to socialize with each other and the staff. There were games and activities for the children. Thanks to the generous donations of several adoptive families, each of the birth mothers in attendance received a holiday gift basket including at least \$50 in gift cards. The adoptive parent holiday open house was also well-attended. A number of recently placed families came with their babies. There were also families who were placed several years ago and some families who are currently awaiting placement. Cookies, snacks and sparkling fruit juice were provided and there were activities for the children. The staff enjoyed the opportunity to socialize and to see the children in their holiday outfits.



Spring 2012 Adoption Education Series



Not only Building Beautiful Families, but Helping Strengthen Them Too!

The Education Series is designed to support families with opportunities to learn about adoption related topics. The adoption journey is lifelong, so regardless of what stage of the adoption process families are in, AFTH's goal is to strengthen families by empowerment through knowledge.

^a Cherry Hill, NJ

The Wonder of Infant Development

Learn more about the fascinating and awe-inspiring journey of infant development. Learn about gross motor, fine motor, visual motor and sensory motor development and how you can provide the best possible learning environment for these skill areas. Mary Pat Kochenash, OTR/L, a Pediatric Occupational Therapist, will talk about these important topics and more to help you as you start on this incredible journey.

Saturday, April 21, 2012

10am-11:30am

\$20/person or \$35/couple

Call (856) 665-5655 with questions.

^a Lancaster, PA

Hair & Skin Care Techniques for Families Adopting Transracially

Time to take the mystery and frustration out of caring for your child's hair. We want to aid parents who have or will adopt transracially in caring for their children's unique hair and skin. A hands-on demonstration will be provided of techniques to use for your children including braiding. Various product, books, and hand-outs will be available. Children are also welcome for a fun evening of learning

Thursday, April 26, 2012

6:30-8:30 PM

\$10/person or \$15/family

Call (717) 399-7766 with questions.

^a Allentown, PA

Infant Care Class

Learn the basics of infant and child care in a comfortable setting with other adoptive and pre-adoptive parents. The class will include everything you need to know about your newborn from giving a bath to burping and swaddling. Please join us for a morning of fun and learning. A light breakfast will be served.

Saturday, March 24, 2012

10am - Noon

\$20/person or \$35/couple

Call (610) 432-2384 with questions.

^a Chesapeake, VA

Open Adoption Q&A for Extended Family

Adoption is a lifelong process that affects extended family members. This class will center on ways they can best support the adoptive family unit by learning more about the open adoption process and its benefits. This class is for waiting and already placed adoptive families and their extended family members.

Saturday, March 24, 2012

11am-12:30pm

\$10/person or \$20/couple

Call (757) 361-0008 with questions.

^a Hockessin, DE

Birthparent Panel

A panel of birthmothers will be present to share and discuss their various experiences with placing their children for adoption. This class is a great opportunity and we encourage all domestic families (waiting and placed) to take part in this unique class. Questions are welcome and encouraged.

Saturday, April 14, 2012

10:30am-12:30pm

\$10/person or \$15/couple

Call (302) 658-8883 with questions.

CLASS REGISTRATION

Please fill out the form & return with payment to:

*Adoptions From The Heart
30-31 Hampstead Circle
Wynnewood, PA 19096*

OR

*REGISTER ONLINE at
www.afth.org/community/courses.html*

Classes are \$10/person or \$15/couple

Price is \$20/person and \$35/couple if noted with ^a

<i># Attending</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Topic/Location</i>
	^a	<u>Newborn & Infant Care Class</u> Allentown, PA
	^a	<u>Wonder of Infant Development</u> Cherry Hill, NJ
		<u>Open Adoption Q&A for Extended Family Members</u> Chesapeake, VA
		<u>Birth Parent Panel</u> Hockessin, DE
		<u>Hair & Skin Care Techniques for Families Adopting Transracially</u> Lancaster, PA

Total Amount Enclosed: _____

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone: () _____ - _____

Email: _____

For More Information...
Call 610-642-7200
or contact your local AFTH office

AFTH Support Groups

Support groups will cover a variety of topics designed for waiting families. Visit our events calendar at www.afth.org for upcoming support group details.

CENTRAL PA

Support group meeting for recently placed and waiting families. Topic: "The Hospital Experience and the Rules of Etiquette"

Monday, Feb. 27 from 6:30-8:30pm

Call (717) 399-7766 or email AmandaK@afth.org

VIRGINIA

Adoptive parent support groups bring AFTH waiting families together. **Call (757) 361-0008**

Cherry Hill, NJ

One-one Support - Social workers available to meet with NJ waiting families to provide support, review profiles and discuss any issues families may have. Must register for time slots between 6:30 and 8:30.

Tuesday, Feb. 21 from 6:30-8:30pm

Call (856) 665-5655 or email MelodyF@afth.org by Feb. 15th to register.

Birthmother support groups help connect women who have or are making an adoption plan for their child. **Call 856-665-5655 or Email MelodyF@afth.org**

DELAWARE & WYNNEWOOD

Adoptive parent support groups bring AFTH waiting families together. **Call the local office for details.**

CONNECTICUT

Join us for an informal waiting adoptive parent support group! They are held quarterly and guest speakers include; adult adoptees, adoptive parents and adoption professionals. Pre-registration required.

Wednesday, April 11 from 7-9pm

Call (860) 657-2626 or Email JoyceF@afth.org.

Our birth parent support group is an informal session offering a unique opportunity for birth parents to meet others who have made a loving adoption plan for their child and to provide a place to share feelings and coping strategies post adoption. RSVP Required.

Friday, April 13 from 1-3pm

Call (860) 657-2626 or Email JoyceF@afth.org.

ALLENTOWN

Waiting family support groups are held for adoptive parents to come and connect.

Call (610) 432-2384 for information.

Discrimination is Alive and Well in Virginia

dis·crim·i·na·tion [dih-skrim-uh-ney-shuhn]

Noun: treatment or consideration of, or making a distinction in favor of or against, a person or thing based on the group, class, or category to which that person or thing belongs rather than on individual merit (Dictionary.com)

What law allows discrimination? If you guessed correctly, it is Virginia's State Board of Social Services decision (5-1) to ALLOW discrimination by foster care and adoption agencies licensed in Virginia. The agencies MAY discriminate and families can LEGALLY be turned down based on sexual orientation, religion, age, gender, disability, political beliefs or family status.

Of course, Adoptions From The Heart does not discriminate against any of the above categories and has no requirements based on the age, race, sexual orientation, disability or religion. We do not even consider asking prospective adoptive parents about political beliefs and gender.

So, an agency can choose to only accept a specific gender, race or religious background? Some agencies discriminate against religion for adoptive parents but certainly not for pregnant clients who are in need of assistance. Why was discrimination allowed by the recent vote? We understand that of the 5 people on the VA Board of Social Services, 2 did not show up to vote in person and only 1 person voted to not allow discrimination. During the 30 day comment period, the Board received 1,611 comments to support expanding the non-discrimination protections and 1,154 comments to oppose the expansion in protections. Despite the comments showing a higher favor of adding more non-discrimination protections, the Board voted the way that they felt was best thus continuing to allow discrimination by Virginia adoption agencies.



Recent Legislation & Studies



VIRGINIA - Virginia's State Board of Social Services allows discrimination by foster care and adoption agencies licensed in VA. Agencies may discriminate based on sexual orientation, religion, age, gender, disability, political beliefs or family status.

ILLINOIS - A new Illinois law allows adult adopted persons born in Illinois to request non-certified copies of their original birth certificates which in most cases will list the first and last names of one or both birth parents. Birth parents who placed children after Jan. 1, 1946, may request that their names be deleted from this copy and all birth parents may indicate their preferences regarding contact.

INDIA - CARA has stopped accepting inter-country adoption cases – new guidelines will be issued in 2012 giving priority to domestic adoption.

USA reports international adoptions continue to decline from 9,320 international adoptions to the United States in 2011, compared to 11,058 adoptions in 2010.

RECENT RESEARCH SHOWS...

- Researchers using the most recent census bureau estimates determined that the number of same sex couples who adopted in the past 10 years has more than tripled.
- “Failed” adoptions are leading to more homeless youth - While foster youths in some states receive benefits until age 21, benefits for adopted youths expire at 18. Youths who are then abandoned by their adoptive family are often left homeless and without a safety net.
- An Ontario longitudinal research study concluded that most children adopted from China form secure attachments.

AFTH Counselors in Action



It was a Monday at 4pm when Adoptions From The Heart received a phone call from a local hospital stating that a woman was there who delivered her baby on Saturday. This woman had called the adoption agency that she was working with multiple times over the weekend and no one returned her calls. Now she is scared. She knows she is unable to care for her baby but her agency has not helped her to select an adoptive

family or given her any counseling through this difficult time in the hospital. AFTH said that we would be there at the hospital to assist her very shortly.

The AFTH counselor arrived at the hospital that very same night by 5:30pm with profiles of adoptive families for the woman to look at. The birth father was at the hospital as well and was so grateful that we were able to come help them so quickly. The couple looked through profiles and fell in love with a same sex couple from New York. The birth father picked out the couple first and said that he loved everything about the couple because they had so much in common with themselves. The birth mother looked at the profile page and said “you are exactly right! They are everything we would ever want our baby to have.”

The AFTH counselor left the hospital around 8:30pm that night with plan of the birth family meeting the adoptive family the very next morning. At 9pm that night, over 100 miles away, a couple is sitting on their couch watching TV when the phone rings. It is AFTH telling them that they have been picked by a couple, the baby was born on Saturday, and they want to meet them tomorrow in PA at 10am!

The adoptive couple was shocked and their excitement was uncontrollable. They rushed out to a baby store that was closing in an hour to buy everything they were going to need for the next few weeks. They both called their bosses to say that they were taking the next two weeks off as they were going to be in PA with a baby! They packed the car, tried to get a little sleep and were on the road to PA by 7am the following morning.

At 10am the next morning in the hospital lobby, amazing connections were made. The adoptive family and birth family discovered they had quite a lot in common and the birth family finally felt peace in their adoption decision for the first time since the baby had been born. The two families were able to share time together in the hospital visiting with and feeding the baby.

The morning ended with a group picture of everyone together with the baby. This picture speaks a thousand words and will be such an important part of this child’s life. THIS is the beauty of adoption. One night in a hospital room a birth family is in distress over the right thing to do for their newborn, while in another home, a prospective adoptive family is waiting for the “call.” By the next morning, a miracle has happened between two families and a connection has been made that will last a lifetime.

AFTH continues their relationship with both sets of parents helping them through the adjustment period that they both had to go through.

One night in a hospital room a birth family is in distress over the right thing to do for their newborn... while in another home, a prospective adoptive family is waiting for the “call”

AFTH Program Updates



DOMESTIC PROGRAMS - As we look back at 2011, Adoptions From The Heart is very proud of all we have been able to accomplish this year. It has been another successful year of placements and we have met some amazing families on this journey. We want to thank all of our adoptive families who have chosen AFTH and we feel blessed to have been able to be a part of building your family.

Adoptions From The Heart continued to work hard through the holiday season. Postcards were sent to all the local hospitals and clinics reminding them that we are available during holidays, evenings, and weekends.

Adoptions From The Heart continues to host support groups in our different local offices for our waiting families and we hope that you will join us. This is a great time to connect with other families who are adopting and to receive updates from your AFTH social worker regarding the Domestic Program. Also stay connected with AFTH by following us on social media sites: Facebook, Twitter, Google+, etc.

Please look for our upcoming Education Series starting in the spring (*see insert for details*). This is a great time for families to continue learning about adoption related issues.

The Spring Education Series includes:

[The Wonder of Infant Development
Newborn and Infant Care Class
Open Adoption Q&A for Extended Family Members
Birthparent Panel
Hair/Skin Care Techniques](#)

Popular classes fill up quickly so be sure to register early to reserve your spot. Register for classes on the online calendar of events at www.afth.org.

AFTH also continues to hold monthly information meetings and webinars for those wanting to learn more about our programs. Visit the calendar of events at www.afth.org for details about and to register for upcoming meetings and webinars.

CHINA - Three families with Log In Date (LID) 8/3/06 received assignments at the end of November. We have no idea when they will travel though it probably will not be for at least two or three months. Our next group has a LID of 9/14/06 and it consists of three families. They are from the Pittsburgh and Allentown offices. We expect that they may be matched sometime in February as the referral time seems to be a little quicker than in the past probably due to the fact that there are many less families in process as most have dropped out.



HEARTBEATS - On December 10th, AFTH *India Surrogacy* Program Coordinator Roberta Evantash attended a seminar in NYC that was presented by the Indian surrogacy clinic AFTH works with. There were about 50 to 60 attendees. The doctor was not in attendance as he had to stay in India to deliver twins. They are the 199th and 200th surrogacy babies born at the clinic. There were numerous families, with their children, who came to give clinic testimonials at the seminar in New York. Roberta was glad to meet clinic staff members with whom she has communicated through phone calls and emails.

AFTH families continue to move along at different stages in the process and the clinic seems very busy with clients from all over the globe. AFTH's first pregnant surrogacy client is due in February.

Join us for a free online webinar on March 13th at 7:00pm. To register for the webinar, visit our online calendar of events at www.afth.org or contact Roberta Evantash at (610) 642-7200 or RobertaE@afth.org.

The *Embryo Placement Program* continues to grow. **Please note that the wait time to be matched with a donor family is only 1-2 months!**

Our next free informational webinar to discuss the Embryo Placement Program will be on March 22 at 6pm. The webinars are being held every other month. Please see the online calendar of events on our website for dates, details, or to register for the upcoming webinar.

Our *Embryo Education Series Courses* continue to run quarterly. The next series will begin in May.

These meetings are all held online and in the evenings. The courses cover different topics including: talking to your children about their embryo placement, talking to your children about having full biological siblings that live with another family, the pro's and cons of an open embryo placement, telling friends and family about embryo placement, and much more.

To learn more about the Embryo Education Series courses and to register, visit the online calendar of events at www.afth.org. For questions about the Embryo Ed Series or Embryo Placement Program, contact Jeanne McGee at JeanneM@afth.org or by call (610) 642-7200.

Stay Informed

Find AFTH On...
Twitter, Facebook
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Got E-mail?

The update listserve is a way for families in our domestic program to stay in the loop of agency updates related to the domestic program. Families in-process can subscribe to the listserve by sending a message with the word "SUBSCRIBE" in the subject line to:

DOMESTIC LISTSERVE -

AFTHDomesticUpdates-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

To connect, support, and share with other AFTH families in the domestic program, join the yahoo group created for discussion and support. To join, send an email with "SUBSCRIBE" in the subject line to the below address:

DOMESTIC DISCUSSION GROUP

AFTHopenadoption-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

AFTH Tori Fund



Tori has suffered
her 5th relapse.

Since the spring of 2007, AFTH has been collecting money to help aid a very special little girl, Tori. At only 9 months, when most babies are beginning to crawl, Tori began fighting for her life after being diagnosed with a rare and aggressive brain tumor.

Throughout the many ups and downs since being diagnosed 5 years ago, Tori's spirit is unwavering even during this most recent set back. "She remains happy, energetic, sassy as anything," says her mom.

Tori's routine MRI in October showed devastating evidence that Tori has relapsed for the 5th time. The new chemo protocol she was put on because Avastin which *was* working may have caused a small bleed in her brain, was unsuccessful against her tumor.

Tori is, and has been for sometime now, on uncharted waters with her treatment. She has continued to defy the odds but the negative side of that is the treatment options are scarce...there is no protocol for her anymore. There hasn't been for some time.

The decision was made to restart Avastin, the chemo which had been successful in the past despite the brain bleed. Tori has had her fifth and final treatment of Avastin and the family is awaiting MRI results.

"We so appreciate the continued support we get from AFTH after all these years."

AFTH welcomes donations for the Tori Fund. The family's greatest expense is traveling back and forth from Central PA to CHOP - gas, tolls, and parking which is occurring every other week and sometimes as much as six times a month. "We used to have a fund through our church that helped defer that cost but it has been depleted for some time now."

Donations for the Tori Fund (please note in check memo) can be sent to AFTH at 30-31 Hampstead Circle, Wynnewood, PA 19096.

International Adoption News

The U.S. Department of State (USDOS) has issued its Fiscal Year 2011 Annual Report on Intercountry Adoption, which can be viewed at: http://adoption.state.gov/content/pdf/fy2011_annual_report.pdf

Sadly, 2011 marked the seventh consecutive year of decline in the number of orphans adopted from abroad to the U.S. The total number of U.S. immigrant visas issued to adopted children in 2011 was 9,320, down from 11,059 in 2010. To provide broader perspective, as recently as 2004 this figure stood at 22,990. The tragedy of this 60% decrease in intercountry adoptions to the U.S. over these past several years is that the reasons for it remain almost completely independent of the continuing need for permanent family care of millions of orphans worldwide. Greatly contributing to the falling numbers are the ongoing “closures” of adoptions from nations including Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Vietnam, and elsewhere, in addition to moratoria or suspensions on adoption processing and/or dossier submission in India, Kazakhstan, Nepal, and Ukraine during part or all of 2011. Given these and other factors, it seems highly likely that the number of intercountry adoptions to the U.S. will decrease again in 2012, possible by as much as an additional 20% compared to the recently-ended year.



The significant majority of intercountry adoptions in 2011 continued to be from, in order, China, Ethiopia, Russia, and South Korea. However, the number of children adopted from each of these four countries in 2011 was smaller than the corresponding figure from 2010. A closer look inside the data also reveals an increasing proportion of adoptions from Africa, with more than one in four international adoptees to the U.S. coming not only from Ethiopia, but also from countries such as Uganda, Nigeria, Congo, Ghana, and Rwanda.

Of note is that, nearly four years following implementation of the Hague Treaty in the U.S., fewer than 30% of adoptions from abroad were Hague Convention cases. In significant part, this continues to reflect the increased administrative complexity, length of processing and, consequently, cost involved in

processing Hague cases, as compared to non-Hague (ie. “Orphan”) adoptions.

An interesting additional component of the USDOS Report is its listing of Hague Convention placements that were “disrupted.” The report notes only five such cases in 2011, and also shows that of the five affected children, four have already been placed with other U.S. families, and the fifth has a prospective such placement. This data is invaluable in demonstrating the tremendously high success rate of adoptions from abroad, and that even in rare cases in which an adoption disrupts, the children involved will still often be provided the opportunity for permanent family care.

In country-specific news:

Ethiopia: Due to a backlog in case processing at the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, including of cases the Embassy had initially found “Not Clearly Approvable,” United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) sent a team of officers to Ethiopia for a two week period in November of 2011 to assist in the review of pending cases. As of the writing of this article, this has resulted in the approval of immigrant visas for more than three-quarters of the 74 pending cases, while additional evidence from agencies and families has been requested in support of outstanding cases. (This writer has already had the happy opportunity to begin post-adoption services with one family among those that had an immigrant visa approved for an adopted Ethiopian child!)

India: On September 30, 2011 the Indian Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) announced that its temporary suspension on the acceptance of new intercountry adoption dossiers would continue through the end of 2011. The reason given for this announcement was the backlog in processing of pending adoption dossiers. As of the writing of this article, CARA had indicated its expectation to resume accepting new dossiers in January of 2012. However, CARA had not yet set its “quota” regarding the number of dossiers that may be submitted.

Kyrgyzstan: The Kyrgyz government is accrediting adoption service providers (ie. adoption agencies) to work in Kyrgyzstan, and this process is expected

to be completed around January of 2012. Any timeframe, however, for the reopening of adoptions from Kyrgyzstan to the U.S. remains unknown. As background, the government of Kyrgyzstan halted all intercountry adoptions in October of 2008. More recently, the Kyrgyz President signed a new Adoption Law on May 6, 2011, and tasked the country's government to bring legislation into conformity with this new law.

Nepal: On November 29, 2011 the Nepalese Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare (MWCSW) formally invited applications for international adoption in 2012. However, due to previous "irregularities" in the processing of adoptions from Nepal, only children that have been legally "relinquished" by their birthparents in Nepal will be eligible for intercountry adoption to the U.S. Of important note is that the large majority of past adoptions from Nepal were of "abandoned" Nepalese children, and that the USDOS suspension on the adoption of children found abandoned in Nepal remains in place. Therefore, American families are cautioned regarding seeking to adopt an orphan from Nepal at this time.

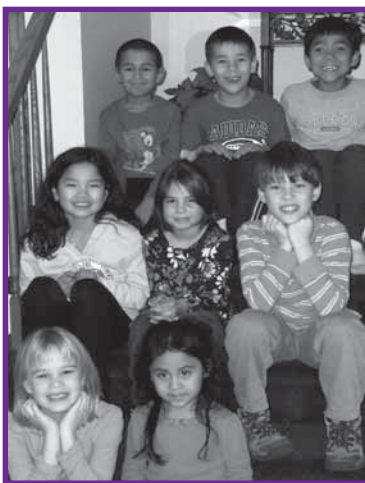
Russia: Nearly two years have passed since an adoptive mother in Tennessee put her seven year old adopted Russian son unescorted on a plane to Moscow, with a note attached to him stating that she no longer wished to parent him. This incident sparked outrage in both Russia and the United States, and led to the slowing of adoptions between the two countries for the better part of a year. To date, Tennessee authorities have not pressed any criminal charges against the adoptive mother. As the agency that placed the child with her, World Association for Children and Parents (WACAP) has now filed suit against the adoptive mother on the boy's behalf, seeking child support payments for the past two years as well as into the future, with money to go into a trust fund to help to provide for the child's care. It is WACAP's (seemingly reasonable) assertion that simply sending the child back to Russia with a note pinned to his jacket does not constitute termination of the adoptive parent's parental rights and responsibilities. The child, named Artyom, is now nine and has just recently been adopted and welcomed into a Russian family of 16.

Taiwan: The legislature in Taiwan passed an amendment to its adoption law on November 11, 2011. This law is expected to require for adoptions to be facilitated by licensed foundations in Taiwan, effectively restricting the processing of adoptions there by independent or unlicensed organizations.

Vietnam: The Hague Convention was ratified in Vietnam on November 1, 2011, and is scheduled to enter into force there on February 1, 2012. This has given rise to hopes of the resumption of adoptions from Vietnam to the U.S., which have been closed since the expiration of the Memorandum of Understanding between the two countries on September 1, 2008. This said, USDOS cautions prospective adoptive parents that "important steps must still take place before intercountry adoptions between the United States and Vietnam can resume."

AFTH provides Home Study, Post-Adoption/Placement Services, Education, and other assistance in support of international adoptions. Contact Sam Wojnilower at 610-642-7200 or SamW@afth.org with questions about the agency's international

Kazakhstan Reunion



Top row: Aiden-7, Nicholas-7, Eric-8

Middle row: Rachel-8, Lana-7, and Alex-10

Bottom row: Molly-7, Grace-5

It was all giggles and smiling faces as five families touched by adoption recently came together for a reunion. All eight children were adopted through AFTH. Grace was adopted from Guatemala and the other seven children were adopted from the Dolphin Baby House in Kostani, Kazakhstan. The families connected with each other at different stages of their adoption journeys and have developed special relationships over the years. In addition to visiting at the AFTH annual picnic, the families get together at least three times a year and all hope to visit their children's home countries in the future. "Eight years ago none of us knew each other, and now we are like family!"



Adoptions From The Heart®

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DOMESTIC INFANT ADOPTION

African-American & Biracial Children Focus

FEBRUARY 7 AT 7PM

MARCH 6 AT 7PM

SURROGACY IN INDIA

MARCH 13 AT 7PM

EMBRYO PLACEMENT PROGRAM

MARCH 22 AT 6PM

Registration Required

Visit the Calendar of Events at www.afth.org

WYNNEWOOD OFFICE
30-31 Hampstead Circle
Wynnewood, PA 19096
610.642.7200

ALLENTOWN OFFICE
2212 Union Blvd
Allentown, PA 18109
610.432.2384

CENTRAL PA OFFICE
1525 Oregon Pike, Suite 402
Lancaster, PA 17601
717.399.7766
717.232.1787

PITTSBURGH OFFICE
1225 South Main St., Suite 207
Greensburg, PA 15601
724.853.6533

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Cherry Hill, NJ 08002
856.665.5655
732.335.8883

DELAWARE OFFICE
18-A Trolley Square
Wilmington, DE 19806
302.658.8883

VIRGINIA OFFICE
1407 Stephanie Way, Suite H
Chesapeake, VA 23320
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