

Adoption News



A Newsletter from:

Adoptions From The Heart

Important COVID-19 Update

As a child welfare agency, we must adhere to the government suggestions and warnings and take abundant caution regarding the rise of COVID-19. Rest assured that the health and well-being of our clients as well as our staff are our top priority. It's important that we take the recommended preventive measures and do our part to help "flatten the curve."

Over the next few weeks, we will exercise more of a "work from home" model for our staff. While staff still has access to the office, we are rotating who is in when to maintain social distancing requirements.

Please note... social workers are still working and will be available to hospitals for emergency placements as well as continuing to work with expecting parents who are considering adoption.

While phones are still being answered, because not all office staff are in a centralized building, **we are asking that families rely on email as a primary way of contact with their social worker.**

Please note, social workers are still working and are available to hospitals for emergency placements as well as continuing to work with expecting parents who are considering adoption.

While there may be new parameters at the hospitals regarding adoption placement procedures, our staff continue to answer calls and assist with placements taking all necessary precautions.

Meetings & Classes

All March events have already been postponed. The hosting of in-person classes will continue to be evaluated. We are exploring video alternatives to hosting classes in order to help keep the process moving forward for adoptive parents. If the need arises, we will cancel and reschedule additional events and make sure to provide you with an advanced notice. We will work with closely and diligently with adoptive parents as best we can to avoid significant delays in your case.

March 2020

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Virtual 5K Announcement & Domestic Adoption Webinars

Locations

Allentown

610.432.2384

Central PA

717.399.7766

Connecticut

860.657.2626

Delaware

302.658.8883

New Jersey

856.665.5655

732.335.8883

New York

800.355.5500

Philadelphia

610.642.7200

Pittsburgh

724.853.6533

Virginia

757.361.0008

804.218.2569

Toll Free: 800.355.5500

Website: www.aftth.org

Spring Ed series classes were announced just prior to all these changes. While we are not making decisions on classes past the end of March at this time, we will continue to evaluate the need to make changes. We are however encouraging adoptive parents to email the contact provided for the class (*see pages 4-5*) in order to register. Then at a later time, prior to the class being held, our staff will send out payment links to those on the attendee list. In the event that a family has already paid for a class and it is canceled in the future, AFTH will issue a refund for that class.

Quarantined Families

Families who are quarantined should notify their social worker immediately. Any adoptive parents under quarantine must be placed on hold for emergency placements. This includes anyone who is not officially diagnosed with COVID-19 but who are under self-quarantine for possibly having exposure to the virus.

Procedure Changes

Our staff has been busy connecting with local courts, hospitals and interstate in order to modify our procedures and adjust to the changes in their protocol.

The situation appears to be ever-changing and as new things develop, we will continue to keep our families informed.

Online Support Groups

Now is a great time to take advantage of our online support groups for waiting families and expecting and birth parents. Contact your social worker to join.

The groups are a great way to stay connected to others while we all continue to follow guidelines to enforce social distancing.

Please know you are not alone. While our physical distance may be 6 feet or more, we are still here all together navigating these new waters. Don't hesitate to reach out to your social worker with any questions or concerns.

AFTH's New Executive Director, Heidi Gonzalez



Since before she was even born, Heidi's life has been impacted by adoption. Her mother, Maxine Chalker was adopted as an infant. Long before open adoption agencies existed, Maxine was personally facing the challenges of closed adoptions. It was that experience along with her work doing hundreds of searches for birth parents

in a public agency that sparked her dream to start an agency founded on the principal of open adoption.

Growing up, Heidi watched her mother build and guide Adoptions From The Heart to success. Heidi even joined in. She has held many different positions at AFTH over the years. From a secretary in high school to a caseworker for families adopting from China. She later ran the Vietnam Program and was the point person for Angelia Jolie's adoption of Pax through AFTH. Heidi was the Director of Marketing and then the Assistant Director prior to being officially named AFTH's new Executive Director in January of 2020.

As a teenager and young adult, Heidi witnessed the struggles that women were experiencing when facing unplanned pregnancies. At times, they even welcomed birth mothers into their own home. Many women felt unsupported by family and friends or pressured by what others thought they should do.

Heidi saw how transformative it was for women to have support and encouragement. She doesn't want women to feel alone. She explained, "I value giving women different options and having them be empowered to make their **own** decisions. When facing a difficult situation, some may feel out of control but to see there were still choices they could make and take back control was powerful for them."

"They have a voice and power during a time that may feel so out of control. They need support and someone to

listen no matter what they decide in the end. Someone to provide information about all their options so they can make an informed decision. Many women had no idea that they could choose the family and stay in touch and even have visits."

Adoption isn't what it used to be and by creating Adoptions From The Heart, Maxine had a hand in advancing open adoption. "AFTH truly honors the spirit of open adoption," Heidi says. "We require all our families to be open to visits and continued communication. It's been great to see how it's changed over the years. Seeing how, at first, society was scared of the concept and now truly embraces it."

Heidi has made many significant contributions to the agency over the years. She has pushed the agency forward with technology advancement from developing AFTH's first website to pushing the agency into the world of social media. Her contributions have made it possible for staff to work remotely which certainly is helpful as we all face changes with COVID-19.

Under Heidi's urging, a Birth Parent Scholarship Fund was developed to provide financial assistance to birth parents who are passionate about reaching their career goals. Scholarship recipients, like Amanda ([see page 6](#)), are moved by the financial support but also hold their heads up higher knowing there are people out there who believe in them.

AFTH has always strived to be welcoming and supportive of the LGBTQ community. Heidi works alongside the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) to ensure that all AFTH staff are educated and equipped to better serve LGBTQ clients. Since 2014, AFTH has earned HRC's seal of approval every year. And in 2019, AFTH received their highest tier of recognition in their All Children All Families initiative: Innovator.

Heidi has seen the agency grow and adapt many times since its inception and we are excited to see where she continues to lead AFTH in the future. Please join us in welcoming Heidi as AFTH's new Executive Director.

*Due to Current Circumstances...
classes are pending changes
Email contact to show interest in class
& office will be in touch with updates*

Classes Designed for Adoptive Parents

Birth parent panels can be invaluable for adoptive parents. If you have not had the opportunity to listen to birth parents sharing their stories, we strongly recommend attending one of our upcoming panels.



Birth Parent Panel: Future Contact (Delaware) \$10/person, \$15/couple

This will be panel discussion of 3-5 previously placed birth parents sharing their stories about openness and their future contact with their child(ren). The goal of this discussion is to hear directly from the women why they chose open adoption. We also are looking at having this educate families on the importance of their commitment and consistency of continuing their obligations regardless of contact from the birth family.

May 9th from 10:30-Noon

Location TBD - potentially a webinar

Register at least 1 week prior: TerriH@afth.org

Birth Parent Panel (Connecticut) \$10/person, \$15/couple

Join us for an informative Birth Parent Panel with several birth mothers and a birth father who will share their experiences with open adoption, and respond to questions about maintaining healthy relationships between birth and adoptive families.

April 21st from 6:30-8:00pm

Location TBD - potentially a webinar

Register at least 1 week prior: DevinC@afth.org

*Email Contact to be added to the Class
Payment will be collected closer to time*

Birth Parent Panel (Virginia) \$10/person, \$15/couple

The Birth Parent Panel includes birth parents of different ages, backgrounds, and adoption stories. Come hear about why they chose adoption, how they picked an adoptive family, their hospital experiences, and the different levels of openness in their adoptions. A waiting adoptive parent support group will be available following the panel. Please email Nicole at NicoleF@afth.org to sign up for the support group after you have registered for the class.

March Date Will Be Rescheduled

Register at least 1 week prior. KimR@afth.org

WEBINAR -Prenatal Drug & Alcohol Exposure - \$35/family

AFTH wants families to make informed decisions when completing their profile keys. Dr. Erin Meyer is an Internal Medicine and Pediatric Hospitalist who worked in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. She is also an adoptive mom, and can speak from both professional and personal angles. She will be discussing the effects of drug and alcohol use during pregnancy on the newborn as well as withdrawal symptoms and short and long term effects of exposure. There will be a time for questions. Each family has to decide what situations are right for them. Many families came away from this class feeling comfortable opening their key.

Online Webinar

May 21st at 7pm

July 11th at 10am

September 8th at 7pm

November 14th at 10am

Link emailed 1-2 business days after registering

Infant and Child Care (Central PA) **\$25/person, \$35/couple**

This infant care class especially for adoptive families will cover the basics of infant and child care including: newborn appearance, newborn behaviors, diapering and dressing, feeding, umbilical cord care, newborn health and safety basics, when to call your pediatrician as well as other changes that may come with new parenthood. This class is exclusively for prospective adoptive parents and allows them to learn in a non-medical environment without a focus on pregnancy and childbirth. There will be plenty of time for questions from AFTH families, this class will count toward the agency's childcare requirement.

**Location: Giant Community Center
in Harrisburg, PA (pending possible changes)**
Time: 6:30-8:30pm

Upcoming Dates:

May 11th, July 27th, September 21st and
December 14th

Register at least 1 week prior: DevinC@afth.org

PA Adoption Laws (Central PA) **\$10/person, \$15/couple**

Attorney Glick with Kling & Deibler, LLP will present the adoption laws that most families may experience as they go through the adoption process in Pennsylvania. There will be plenty of time for all your questions to be addressed.

April 30th from 6:30-8:00pm

Location TBD - potentially a webinar

Register at least 1 week prior: DevinC@afth.org

Telling Your Child Their Difficult History (New Jersey)

\$10/person, \$15/couple

Sharing painful or sensitive information about a child's history or birth family can be challenging. This workshop will help develop your skills to competently tell your children difficult information and help them process it. The class will be hosted by the New Jersey Resource Clearing House the one-stop resource for those touched by adoption - and is being presented by Rebecca Gallese, a Consultant for the Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship (QIC-AG)

April 21st from 6:30-8:00pm

(pending possible date change)

AFTH Cherry Hill Office

Register at least 1 week prior: JanF@afth.org

Financing an Adoption (Bethlehem) **\$10/person, \$15/couple**

Domestic infant private adoption costs can range from \$10,000 to more than \$50,000. With these fees, many ask how are families budgeting and financing their adoptions. In this educational series Mary E. Lisicky a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ will be discussing budgeting, financing strategies, adoption loans, adoption grants, adoption tax credit and additional post placement advice for you and your child's future. Attorney Dorota Gasienica-Kozak, Esq will also be present to answer any questions on adoption legal proceedings and fees associated.

April 25th from 10:30-Noon

Location TBD - potentially a webinar

Register at least 1 week prior: OliviaS@afth.org

AFTH Waiting Adoptive Families Will Receive Required Continuing Education Credits for Attending These Classes!

Amanda, 2020 Spring Birth Parent Scholarship Winner



Meeting Amanda

A southern girl at heart, Amanda was born in Clovis, New Mexico and later raised in Dallas, Texas. She enjoys rock climbing and drawing in her free time. Amanda has always wanted to pursue a career within therapy, likely stemming from her passion for psychology, childhood development, and educational development. Amanda currently

works at a behavioral hospital which, over the years, has only made her even more sure of her goal to work in therapy. She wants to succeed in school and grow professionally. When she received the email from Adoptions From The Heart congratulating her as the scholarship recipient, **she felt a significant shift in hope for her future.**

Sign of Hope

Amanda works long night time shift hours at the behavioral hospital. Therefore, when she was checking her emails, she was very sleep deprived. "When I got the email, I started to cry. I read it multiple times because I couldn't believe it was true," Amanda recalled. She felt like a huge weight was lifted off her shoulders. Most would assume the huge weight that was lifted would be concerning finances. Indeed, her financial situation played a key role, **however, the scholarship meant more than just the money. "I felt like someone finally believed in me," Amanda explained. The scholarship gave her the motivation and courage to follow her dream.**

Pregnancy Journey

Amanda's journey as a birth mother began when she was twenty years old. One day, she and her sister were running errands. Amanda's sister could tell something was off and suggested she take a pregnancy test. Amanda bought a test in Walmart and took it immediately. After five minutes of waiting, she looked at the test. It was positive. Amanda was immediately

overwhelmed with emotions, but above all, she knew she needed to come up with a plan. Amanda's mom and stepdad knew she was confused and needed help. Her mom, who lived eight hours away, got in her car and drove to comfort her baby girl in person during this overwhelming time.

Finding an Adoptive Family

A few days later, Amanda was scrolling through Facebook and came across a post from an old friend, Hannah. She and her significant other, Brandon, had been trying to have a baby for the past eight years, were now beginning the adoption process. About a week later, Amanda met up with Hannah to talk. The two exchanged stories and there was a particular moment which struck Amanda's heart. Hannah told Amanda about a dream Brandon had the previous

night. His dream involved a little girl with curly brown hair. Amanda's eyes lit up because she had just found out, an hour before their meeting, that she would be giving birth to a baby girl. At that moment, Amanda felt like Hannah and Brandon were to be her baby's adoptive parents.

The scholarship meant more than just the money... "I felt like someone finally believed in me." - Amanda

[Click here to see Amanda's Open Adoption Unfold](#)

Amanda's Advice for Other Expecting Parents and for Her Daughter

As a strong believer in therapy, Amanda has advice for other birth mothers. "Utilize therapy and counseling, as it helps to talk about your story and have peace with it," Amanda explained. Like most parents, Amanda has thought about future advice to give Lilly as she is growing up. "She should never give up. I want her to set goals and work towards them. I always want her to do the best she can and never dwell on past failures. Lastly, continue to spread love!"

AFTH is now accepting applicants for Fall 2020. [Click to learn more.](#) Those interested in making a donation to support the Scholarship Fund and future winners just like Amanda, visit www.afth.org/donate



Annual Summer Picnics

**RAIN or
SHINE!**

32nd Annual Picnic - Fort Washington, PA



**Sunday, June 7th
11am - 2pm**

Thank you for allowing us to be a part of your journey to becoming a family. Join AFTH staff and families (both domestic and international) as we celebrate family.

Bring a blanket and picnic lunch. AFTH will provide some drinks, snacks and entertainment. You will not want to miss out on the raffles. All the proceeds raised from the raffles benefit AFTH's Expecting and Birth Parent Support Fund.

Families with **OPEN ADOPTIONS**, we encourage you to invite your child's birth parent(s) to the picnic. It's a great place for a visit surrounded by others who are also touched by adoption! **Send a letter of invitation for AFTH to pass along.** Please include a separate confidential note to our staff with your full name and birth parent's names. Be sure to send it in enough time for us to forward and receive a response. AFTH will not invite birth parents without a family's consent.

Arts & Crafts,
Live Music, Snacks
Face Painting, and Ice Cream
for each child!

**Free Family
Portraits!**

What To Know Before You Go:

- If you are meeting others, be sure to designate a specific area to meet (*balloons are great to help connect*)
 - Mark all valuables with your name
 - Please supervise children at all times

****DO NOT PARK ON GRASS UNLESS DIRECTED BY A PARK RANGER**

Fort Washington State Park - Flourtown Picnic Area

44 W. Mill Rd., Flourtown, PA 19031

Use the above address in your GPS.

You will arrive directly across the street from the park.

Virginia Annual Picnic

Saturday, June 6th
Noon - 3pm

Chesapeake City Park
"Fun Forest" is the
ultimate playground.

Check out the...

- Shaky Bridge • Dolphin Tunnel
- Whisper Dishes • Plant Walk
- Underground Telephone
- Fossil Dig-a-dinosaur



Come and enjoy our annual adoption celebration!

Bring a picnic lunch (grills available for families to use)

Come celebrate another year of open adoption with AFTH at our annual picnic. Please bring a lunch for your group. Drinks, ice, and paper products will be provided. There are also charcoal grills available for use at the park.

Families with **OPEN ADOPTIONS**, if you are inviting your child's birth family please send an invitation to them with enough time for coordination. If sending your invitation to AFTH to pass along please include your full names and birth parent names on a separate confidential note for our staff.

We are looking forward to seeing you there!

RSVP by May 29th

Email KimberlyR@afth.org or call 757-361-0008



Connecticut Annual Picnic



*Sunday, June 28th 2020
Noon - 3pm*

*Beardsley Zoo
in Bridgeport, CT*

We hope you will join us!

A Fun Day at the Zoo

- See Over 300 Different Animals
- Stroller Rentals Available
- Parking is Free

Bring your own lunch or order at the Peacock Cafe. We encourage families in **OPEN ADOPTIONS** to invite their child's birth parents. It's a great place for a visit.

Tickets Must Be Purchased in Advance:

Deadline: May 29th

\$9/person and Children under 3 Free

Send checks payable to
Adoptions From The Heart
1 Regency Drive #108
Bloomfield, CT 06002

Please note the number of
adults & children.

Contact:

SusanM@afth.org

860-657-2626



NEW LOCATION

Pittsburgh Annual Picnic



Date & Location to Be Announced

Last year was the first year that we held our Pittsburgh Picnic at a new location. We we happy to see so many families come out to the park to join us. The children enjoyed the playground - there were lots of smiles and laughter to go around. We love getting together and seeing how much the children are growing.

We are looking forward to another year gathering together with domestic and international families. We encourage reunions with birth parents as well. Be sure you get all the details about the Pittsburgh Summer Picnic, follow AFTH on Facebook or contact JoanS@afth.org.

Now Accepting Photos for the 2021 AFTH Calendar



Submit your photos by July 1st, 2020

Email photos to KristyG@afth.org

Include: parents name & address, child's name, age, & birth country

If sending multiple emails due to file size, be sure to number the emails (for example: 1 of 4, 2 of 4 etc.)

Or Mail Photos to: Marketing Team Calendar Search/AFTH
30-31 Hampstead Circle Wynnewood, PA 19096

Tips for Submitting Your Photos:

- *horizontal layout preferred
- *send a variety of photos (seasonal photos a plus)
- *No adults in photos please
- *Use highest pixel setting on camera/phone
- *Siblings (adopted or not) can be included in some photos as well

Doulas and Adoption

Did you know...adoptive parents can benefit from hiring a doula too?

Some people have never heard of a doula. “You do what?” Is something I’ve gotten used to hearing. When I explain what I do as a Postpartum Doula, most people who have lived through the first weeks at home with a newborn think having a doula sounds like a dream. I’ve realized recently though, maybe because of the word postpartum, that adoptive families are unsure of whether a postpartum doula is “for them”.

Let me tell you, without hesitation, you would absolutely benefit from a doula and here’s why...

Life with a newborn is hard. There, I said it. I realize that some families are afraid to say it. Maybe even more so in the cases of adoption. You’ve waited so long for this baby to arrive, you’ve invested so much and now he’s finally here and well, maybe you’d feel like a jerk if you complain. Listen there is nothing, I repeat NOTHING, like the first weeks home with your new baby. Yes, there’s joy and cuddles and A LOT of cuteness, but there’s also crying and confusion and a major learning curve as you all get to know each other. Getting to know each other, not because you didn’t carry the baby for the last 9 months, but because he is adjusting to life on earth! He has never drank milk or even breathed air! And you are adjusting to life as a parent.

The first three months after the baby is born are often referred to as the fourth trimester. This is **your** trimester!

As new parents, this is all about learning about your baby. How does he like to be soothed? What does that cry mean? How do you know that he’s getting enough to eat? Yes, there are things you can do to prepare for life with a newborn: read books and take classes. *(I might be a bit partial, but I totally recommend my online course [Expecting 101...You’re Adopting!](#) which qualifies for AFTH’s childcare class requirements).*



But one of the greatest things about having a doula, especially during this fourth trimester, is having your own expert on the scene!

When I get to someone’s house, typically one of the first things Mom or Dad does is whip out their phone and open the notes section where they’ve jotted down some questions. Is it weird that his skin is flaking on his head? Last night he was so gassy, any ideas how we can help him at times like that? I feel like we need a bouncy seat, any recommendations which one? Life with a newborn will be a temporary stop for you. Before you know, it he’ll be rolling and crawling and you’ll be off to the toddler years. As postpartum doulas newborns are our life. Having an expert to walk alongside you during this transitional period can help things go much more smoothly!

[Continue reading here to learn:](#)

What Does a Doula Even Do?

How Do You Find a Postpartum Doula?



Valerie Trumbower is a DONA Certified Postpartum Doula, a Certified Lactation Counselor and the mother for three, including a set of twins. Her online courses [Expecting 101™](#) and [Expecting 101...You’re](#)

[Adopting™](#) have helped many families prepare for life with their newborns.

Agency News

Domestic Program Update

When deciding on a level of openness you are comfortable with, it is important to determine what will work best for your family, not just in your current situation but going forward as the child grows up. Be sure not to make any promises you aren't certain that you will be able to keep. Once you decide on an openness level, your profile will only be shown to expecting parents who desire a similar level of openness. The agency's minimum requirement is that all families be open to at least one in person visit a year, sending a set of pictures within the first five days of placement and continuing for the following six months and then once a year on the child's birthday until they are 18 years old.

In 2019, **34% of expectant/birth mothers requested TWO visits per year.** The second most popular request was one visit a year with the 3rd most popular request being three visits a year.

AFTH has seen an increase in birth parent request for phone, text or email contact. In addition to letters and pictures, we now offer this option to expectant parents. Adoptive Parents can specify their preferences on the AFTH profile key.

As you may already know, a high percentage of all AFTH placement are emergencies. This attests to our social workers' strong relationships with hospitals and staff. They know from past experience with AFTH that they can rely on us to be there anytime we are needed and that we will be there for patients no matter what they decide in the end. Since July, the majority of our placements each month have been emergency placements. In 2019, 54% of our placement were emergency placements. This is 4 percent higher than in 2018.

The agency maintains its policy and commitment to placing long waiting families. Occasionally there are expectant parents who do not wish to select a

family and ask the agency to do so. It's the agency policy to select the longest waiting family who **matches the situation** and birth parent preference. In 2019, 14% of expectant parents, did not wish to select a family which is 2% less than in 2018.

AFTH continues to see situations where there is some amount of substance use. In 2019, 65% of expectant/birth mothers used *some* amount of drugs/alcohol at some point during pregnancy. This is 1% less than in 2018. A few drinks per month in the first trimester remains to be the most common. After that, opioids were the most common (*including methadone and Suboxone*) followed by alcohol and cocaine. The agency does not track marijuana or cigarette use however, if we did, the 65% of situations with some level of drug/alcohol use would increase largely.

The agency maintains its commitment to serving all members of the triad. While each state has various laws regarding a birth father's rights, AFTH puts a strong emphasis on serving birth fathers and involving birth fathers in adoption planning and openness. However, there are situations where a birth mother may be able to withhold his information, have unknown information regarding him, or fathers who do not wish to participate. In 2019, 61% of AFTH's placements **did not** have birth father involvement. This is 12% higher than in 2018.

AFTH began tracking mental health reporting in 2019. Depression and Anxiety continue to be the most reported mental health. Overall the agency saw 30% of expectant/birth mothers reported a mental health issue with no medication, while 14% reported mental health with medication.

Payment for living expenses for expecting parents is allowed in all states besides Pennsylvania. Medical expenses are available in all of the agencies 6 states. In 2019, 25% of expectant/birth mothers requested living expenses averaging \$2,100, while only 6% requested medical assistance averaging \$3,122. In 2018, the average living expenses requested were \$2,388. The average of medical expenses was \$3,341.

Agency Waiting Statistics

As of March 1st, 74% of AFTH's waiting families have been waiting for 18 months or less and 55% a year or less. For families open to African-American children, 90% are waiting 18 months or less, 73% a year or less and 48% 6 months or less.

If you find yourself struggling with the wait, please don't hesitate to reach out to your social worker. Another thing that can be helpful is to attend an AFTH waiting family support groups. Families come together, share their experiences and gain support from each other as well as their social worker.

Legislation



U.S. Supreme Court Agreed to Hear Case Regarding Tax-Payer Funded Adoption Agencies and LGBTQ Discrimination

Last month, the U.S. Supreme Court announced it will hear the case of *Fulton v. Philadelphia* to determine if tax-funded adoption and foster care agencies can legally discriminate against LGBTQ people. Read more about the case [here](#).

While the actual case would not be heard until some time in 2021, legal experts warn that the decision could have a much more broad impact on nondiscrimination protections. The idea that public funded organizations being able to legally discriminate against individuals or groups of people is alarming. Stay up to date with the [HRC](#).

AFTH Support Groups



Waiting Family Support Group

AFTH understands the waiting process can be hard for families and so AFTH local offices host support groups for waiting families to come together in support. Support groups are led by AFTH staff and will cover a variety of topics designed for waiting families. Visit our online events calendar www.afth.org for upcoming support group details or call your local office for more information.

AFTH has a private facebook support group. Email your social worker for a link to join.

Birth Parent Support Groups

One of the most helpful healing tips that many birth parents have found is to connect to others who really “get it.” AFTH's birth parent support groups bring together men and women who have made the difficult decision to place their children. It's important to find support throughout the entire process, especially post placement. Friends and family as well as your adoption counselor can be great supporters. However connecting with others who have travelled down the same road can provide another level of understanding and support that those who haven't personally placed a child are unable to truly provide. Call your local office, 800-355-5500, for more details or visit our events calendar at www.afth.org for upcoming support group details.

AFTH has a private facebook support group. Email your social worker for a link to join.



Reunion Story: Robotics Led Me Back to My Birth Country

Jeff and Maxine Miller adopted their daughter Alexandra from China when she was 10 ½ months old. While growing up in rural Maryland, she became involved in her school's Robotics program. She was later awarded a Dean's List Award, giving her the opportunity to attend Worcester Polytechnic Institute's (WPI) summer "Frontiers" program.

A highlight of the program is the Interactive Qualifying Project (IQP), an interdisciplinary social science project. Among the 60 locations Alexandra could choose to go complete her IQP, one just happened to be in her birth country of China. She recalls the exact moment when she learned there was a project site in Hangzhou which was only about 3 hours from the town she lived in as a baby. Alexandra was excited for the opportunity to immerse herself in the culture. "I did not go with the intention of searching for my birth family," she said. Little did she know what fate had in store for her.

Her team was directed to conduct interviews with a professor in Quzhou, the same town as the orphanage she was from. "Through a wild, fortuitous sequence of events due to my newfound connection with this professor, I was reunited with my birth family. I am unable to articulate fully the extent to which this has impacted my life. Upon reflection of the series of seemingly unrelated life events that led me to FIRST, to WPI, to Hangzhou, and ultimately to my birth family..." Alexandra believes it was all meant to be and part of a larger plan.

Upon connecting, her birth parents disclosed they originally connected with a family in China who agreed to adopt Alexandra. Their hope was for her to be raised nearby so they could keep in contact. Due to restrictions of the Chinese government, their plan proved to be impossible and she was instead taken to the orphanage. Alexandra explained, "Because communication was not good then, my parents didn't know where I went, and they went looking for me."

Alexandra was preparing for a small intimate meeting with her birth parents. She was in for a big surprise. The first person to enter the room was her



birth father, followed by her birth mother followed by a ton of other family members consisting of aunts, uncles, and cousins. The reunion was overwhelming but in the best way possible. "Now I have two loving families, my family of three in the US and my family of 30+ in China!" said Alexandra.

Amongst all the relatives she met that day, meeting her biological sister is a moment she will never forget. After Alexandra was placed for adoption, her birth parents married and had another daughter nine years later. When they met, the sisterly bond was instant. "We have an unspoken understanding and similar demeanor," Alexandra described her relationship with her sister.

While exploring a reunion can be scary, Alexandra reminds adoptees to be "open and prepared for anything under the sun." At first, it is normal to have an awkward interaction with birth parents whom you haven't seen in years. Alexandra notes it's important to think about the birth parent perspective as well. They could feel shame and guilt. "I tried my best to assure them [birth family] that I loved them and what happened was simply my story, our story. I approached it as, 'come as you are,'" said Alexandra.

Today Alexandra, her birth parents, and birth sister faithfully send video messages to one another through WeChat. This summer, she plans to not only visit but stay with her birth family for a few months. She is grateful of how all the pieces came together to make this reunion possible.

[See Her Full Story Here](#)

Behind the Scenes

Showing you a sneak peek into the lives of AFTH's social workers



March is National Social Work Month and is all about celebrating our agency's dynamite adoption social workers. It is not a secret that a social worker's job extends beyond the hours 9 to 5, Monday-Friday. There is so much more that goes into being an adoption social worker than just holding meetings and showing up at the hospital for placements. It is time for us to show you what goes on behind-the-scenes while social workers are on the job!

"Samantha had recently placed her baby for adoption and was working on a plan in raising her other two children. She secured a job at a grocery store but had no way to get there. She had to take an Uber every day, and the cost was eating up her paycheck. She had her permit but had no one that would lend her their car or take her for her driver's test. I offered my car and took her (several times) to take her driver's test. I will always remember that day—she jumped out of the car running and screaming through the parking lot towards me, tears streaming down her face stating "I passed! I passed! I did it!" That look of total joy and confidence -that she could now make it on her own—is something that I will never forget. As a social worker, I felt great satisfaction and pride for Samantha! I was a part of something much bigger in her life—her journey towards independence and the beginning of success for her in reaching her goals in life." -Joan Smith

Hear about all the other unexpected Behind the Scenes moments [here](#).

Congratulations to AFTH's Newest Families...

Daughters

Eric & James
Michaela
Philip & Jennifer
Chancity
Pete & Nicole
Christopher & Kelly
Will & Brian
Paul & Mark
David & Sarah
Lauren
Jason & Erin
Ryan & Melanie
Darryl & Jamie
Brian & Maria



Sons

Michael & Lauren
Richard & Yolanda
Mott & Nicole
Charles & Anthony
Michael & Corinne
Bruno & Rebecca
Michael & Nicolas
Brian & Justin
William & Amy
Sarah
Joseph & Melissa
Edward & Joseph
Christopher & Kristin
Melanie
Joseph & Katie
Kevin & Kristin
Eric & Sara



30-31 Hampstead Circle
Wynnewood, PA 19096

Adoption News is a publication of Adoptions From The Heart, a private, non-profit, licensed agency.



While we are sad to say we have had to cancel our traditional 5K we host every April, we refuse to let it get our spirits down and instead are launching ***AFTH's First VIRTUAL 5K!***

With social distancing at the forefront, we have reinvented our 5K to accommodate our current situation while also opening up the opportunity for people everywhere to **come together not in-person but in support** of a great cause!

Virtual 5K participants register and then complete their steps *anywhere* the weekend before Mother's Day (May 1-3). T-shirts and medals included!

Without being limited by geographic constraints, we are calling ALL adoption supporters to step up and show up in support. *See Details*

FREE ONLINE WEBINARS

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FROM THE COMFORT OF YOUR HOME*

DOMESTIC INFANT ADOPTION

APRIL 15TH AT 7PM

MAY 20TH AT 7PM

Registration Required

www.afth.org