

Adoption News

A Newsletter from:

Adoptions From The Heart



Better Understanding Addiction

Breaking Down Stigma Surrounding Addiction & Adoption

At Adoptions From The Heart, currently more than 60% of our expectant and birth mothers report use of drugs and/or alcohol during pregnancy. Some report only recreational or occasional use, however, we also see many women who are actively addicted or in recovery from addiction.

While the stereotype that all birth mothers are addicts is untrue, the United States is facing a nationwide opioid epidemic, and we are seeing more and more pregnant women who are struggling with this **disease**.

As adoption professionals, we regularly educate and talk with prospective adoptive parents about the impact of substance use on the pregnancy and the baby. However, we don't spend an equal amount of time discussing what may be behind the scenes with the birth mother's dependency or addiction and we hope to change that by providing families with more discussion and resources to better explain addiction.

“Birth parents struggling with addiction ONLY want the best for their child and sometimes they are unfairly judged by adoptive parents because of misunderstandings about addicts.”

*Susan Myers,
Adoption Social Worker*

One out of ten American adults and teens have a drug and/or alcohol dependence problem. 15.6% of the US adult population will engage in illicit drug use at some time and 3% of those users will become addicted. (*Gateway Treatment Centers, 2015*)

The Role of Stigma

There continues to be a stigma around addiction, even among professionals. Many people freely express negative opinions about the behaviors, morals, or lifestyles of smokers, alcoholics, and other substance users. Think about a time when you may have fallen into a negative perception of such a person's behavior as a lifestyle choice,

rather than an addiction. How many people do you know who overeat, overwork, smoke, or have a problem with controlling their shopping, internet use, gaming or gambling?

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December 2019



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.afth.org

Saying that "it's a choice" implies that otherwise intelligent adults choose to engage in a behavior that can rob them of their dignity, health, finances, family, and sanity. It also puts us in the role of judge without understanding contributing individual factors.

The scientific community agrees that addiction is a disease, "a disorder of structure or function, especially one that produces specific signs or symptoms".

The National Institute of Drug Abuse defines addiction as "a chronic, relapsing disorder characterized by compulsive drug seeking, continued use despite harmful consequences, and long-lasting changes in the brain. It is considered both a complex brain disorder and a mental illness. Addiction is the most severe form of a full spectrum of substance use disorders, and is a medical illness caused by repeated misuse of a substance or substances.

Drugs affect the brain's reward center by releasing large amounts of neurotransmitters, like dopamine, which cause feelings of euphoria, pleasure, and relaxation. Chronic drug use affects the reward and memory centers of the brain and actually **rewires the circuitry, making it harder and harder to feel "normal" without use of the substance.** The focus of a person's life changes to craving, seeking, and then using, in a never-ending cycle.

The Role of Trauma

60-70% of individuals with a substance use disorder have a "trauma" trigger (*Gateway Treatment Centers, 2015*). In other words, a traumatic event or events in childhood led them to use substances for self-soothing and stress reduction. Some become addicted, others do not. The recent research and information about ACE's helps explain this common occurrence.

"I think improving our understanding of the connection between trauma and addiction can only help the relationship in open adoption."

*Susan Myers,
Adoption Social Worker*

Understanding Addiction: The Role of Trauma Continued

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are stressful or traumatic experiences, including abuse, neglect and a range of household dysfunction such as witnessing domestic violence, or growing up with substance abuse, mental illness, parental discord, or crime in the home. ACEs are strongly related to development and prevalence of a wide range of health problems, including substance abuse, throughout the lifespan.

When children are exposed to chronic stressful events, neuro-development can be disrupted which impedes the ability to cope with negative or disruptive emotions and contribute to emotional and cognitive impairment. Over time, often during adolescence, a child adopts coping mechanisms, such as substance use.

The original ACE study in 1995 involved over 17,000 patients. It was conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in collaboration with the health maintenance organization Kaiser Permanente. The study found ACEs are common, with 28% reporting physical abuse and 21% reporting sexual abuse. Mental illness and substance abuse of a parent were also common. The findings also showed that a person's cumulative ACE score has a strong relationship to numerous health, social and behavioral problems throughout their lifespan, including substance use and abuse (*SAMHSA bulletin, 2015*).

According to the National Institute of Drug Addiction (2011) and the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2008), **59% of childhood trauma survivors will develop a substance use disorder.**

People addicted to drugs are twice as likely to suffer from anxiety/depression or other mood disorders. It is also estimated that 80% of women in drug treatment have suffered physical or sexual abuse.

Relapses are part of recovery. Approximately **half of those trying to get sober will return to heavy use:**

- 70-90% experience at least one mild to moderate slip
- first 90 days in recovery are when most relapses occur
- After which chances of relapse decrease with time.
- Between 30 & 90 days in recovery, symptoms of underlying psychological issues can peak

Think about an expectant mother, struggling to deal with an addiction, facing an unplanned pregnancy and trying to choose the family who is going to be raising her child. Most feel shame, embarrassment and worry about what adoptive parents will think of them. At times, these emotional conflicts can influence their hesitation to have contact after placement.

“AFTH's willingness to accept me and my child, made this process so much easier and so much less nerve-racking than it could have been and meant the world to me. Honestly, it was the first time I was able to completely open up and be honest about my addiction with anyone and it was definitely one of the first Stepping Stones towards my sobriety.” Allison Fox, placed in Jan 2017

“It meant everything to have a safe place to speak about my addiction, in complete honesty, knowing I wouldn't be judged or thought differently about. Usually addicts are judged and rarely have the love and support we need to recover and/or maintain recovery. But with AFTH, I never once felt judged or not loved and supported.” Kristen Dziegielewski placed in March 2017

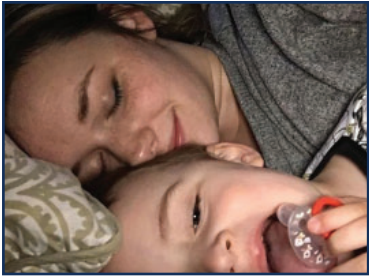
Our hope is that learning about the relationship between trauma and substance abuse can increase an adoptive parent's empathy for the birth parent's life circumstances, rather than judging them and approaching open adoption with fear and reluctance.

“What many people fail to remember is that a birth parent is a real person, who is just trying to get by like everyone else. Addiction is a true struggle and one that should receive empathy and not judgment. When you choose to embrace a birth parent, that may come with inconsistency on the other side. Learning how to accept that inconsistency, and still show true love and respect is the key towards understanding open adoption.”

Amanda Aliberti, Adoption Counselor

Lucy, AFTH's 2019 Fall Birth Parent Scholarship Winner

Since a very young age, Lucy has been exposed to the world of adoption. An adoptee herself, Lucy was born in Reading, PA. She was adopted at birth and spent the first 5 years of her life in Virginia with her family. They later moved back to Central Pennsylvania.



She's very passionate about parenting her 3-year-old son, Atlas, who is also her best friend. She wants to succeed in school and grow professionally. Lucy was having financial difficulties with school and felt like her

“success plan”, of receiving her bachelor's in four years, seemed impossible. Even with this financial setback, Lucy was still determined to be successful. She dropped all her classes except for one because that was all she could afford. “I was going to graduate. **I was going to do it even if it took me several years,**” said Lucy.

Feeling Hopeful

One day while Lucy was at work, she received an email from Adoptions From The Heart announcing that she was the Birth Parent Scholarship Fund winner! She applied for the scholarship a few weeks back and never thought she would have been chosen as the winner.

“The world finally felt like it was falling into place for me. I thought to myself, this doesn't have to be a 7-year thing anymore. I can graduate in 4 years.”

“I immediately started crying because I was so happy. The world finally felt like it was finally falling into place for me. I thought to myself, this doesn't have to be a 7-year thing anymore. I can graduate in 4 years. I'm going to be successful,” said Lucy.

This achievement meant more to Lucy than it might to others. She has undergone challenging times for many years. She was a struggling alcoholic when she became pregnant for a second time. “When I found out I was pregnant, I was on the verge of being homeless, I was

unemployed, and broke. I had nothing. My pregnancy with Avery was something that changed and saved my life. **She made me want to be a better person,**” emphasized Lucy.

Her Journey as a Birth Mother

Lucy discovered she was pregnant very early at 7 weeks. She knew that something was off with her body. “Since I was already pregnant before with my son, I was familiar with the feeling,” Lucy explained. She went to A Women's Concern for a free pregnancy test and it read positive. Lucy knew she needed help. She checked herself into a rehabilitation center. The center guided her towards her path to sobriety and worked with her to come up with a pregnancy plan. Lucy knew placing for adoption was the best choice for her and her baby.

Lucy began working with a local adoption agency and her social worker went above and beyond. Before meeting with her social worker, Lucy wanted a closed adoption because that was all she knew. After learning about open adoption, Lucy knew open adoption was the way to go. Open adoption allows for some form of communication between birth parents, adoptees, and adoptive parents. This can range from pictures, letters, and phone calls to contact through an intermediary, to open contact between the parties themselves.

At this point, Lucy had a support system and an idea of what she wanted her adoption plan to look like. She began looking through profiles of prospective adoptive parents. The process can be overwhelming. She made a pile of “yes” and “maybes” until she came across one particular family. “All it took was one look at the mother and I instantly just felt this connection,” said Lucy. She then knew she found Avery's adoptive parents.

A Perfect Fit

Avery's adoptive parents went above and beyond for Lucy too. Lucy had a few special requests for them. She wanted them to educate themselves on alcoholism and the effects that come with it. Avery's adoptive parents went to classes, read books, and attended meetings all in preparation upon Avery's arrival. Their dedication

Lucy's Story Continued

to preparing for Avery was something that Lucy was extremely appreciative of.

The day after Lucy gave birth, Avery's adoptive parents came to see them in the hospital. There was an instant connection between my family and the couple that put Lucy at ease. She explained, "It felt like we all knew each other our whole lives, and that this was all supposed to happen." Though this process was one of the most difficult times Lucy endured, she knew that she made the right decision for Avery.

Lucy's Insight

Lucy's advice for other recovering addicts struggling with their sobriety: "Take it one day at a time. If that's too much, take it moment by moment. By doing this, your avoiding disappointment. Sometimes when we plan too far ahead, we set ourselves up for disaster."

She also has advice to others when it comes to surviving and overcoming hardships: "Even when things seem hopeless, it gets better. You need to have patience and trust, and with that, you can overcome anything."

A New Kind of Mother

After placement, Lucy says that she began rebuilding the relationship that was slipping away with her son due to her addiction. "It is a relationship I got back because of my adoption placement. I get to spend every day with him and got a second chance at being a mom, while Avery's adoptive parents got a chance to be parents. My placement was such a gift to both of our families and I still get to see her," Lucy shared.

Impact of the AFTH's Scholarship

"Having this scholarship allows me to succeed at work and school, while still making it home to tuck my son into bed at night. I can do all of this, without having to worry about getting a second job," Lucy said.

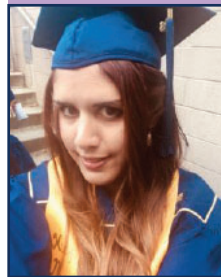
Year after year, the Scholarship Fund continues to help birth parents move forward towards success. Anyone interested in helping can make a donation to the fund at www.afth.org/donate

Where Are They Now?

Updates from Past Scholarship Winners

Morgan M. - Spring 2017

"Since receiving AFTH's Birth Parent Scholarship, I have been able to achieve both my Bachelor's in Human Resources Leadership and Master's in Business Administration finishing both degrees with the highest honors. Without the scholarship, I may have never been able to push through both degrees and see that light at the end of the tunnel for a better future. I've begun my career in HR working with a nonprofit. The scholarship meant so much to me. I would be honored to be a part in giving back to other birth parents."



Marisa K. - Fall 2016

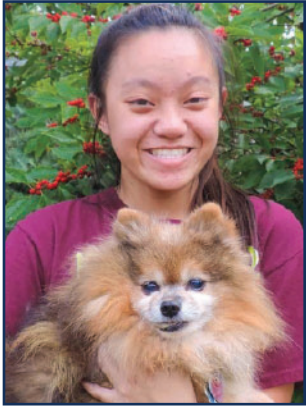
"It was scary not knowing how I would support myself, but I was determined to finish my education despite the uncertainties. The scholarship helped during this trying time. I finished my last 2 years of college, graduating in 2018 with a BA in Psychology and a BA in sociology, maintaining a spot on the Dean's list every quarter. Today I work at an autism treatment center and also at a homeless shelter, and in both places, I work to pay forward the overflowing love and compassion I was given and use my education to help others see and overcome the odds stacked against them."

Madison H. - Fall 2016

"I have been flourishing! I finished my Associates which the Birth Parent Scholarship helped me achieve. I then went on to Esthetician School which I just finished on April 11, 2019. Now I'm a Licensed Esthetician and Professional Makeup Artist. I'm really doing great and I'm so thankful for your scholarship. Not only did it help me finish school but it made me feel so appreciated that there are people who think about birth moms."

Most Children Only Have One Birthday - I Celebrate Three

Written By Anna Panxiao Kreider who was adopted through AFTH's China Program over 17 years ago.



On June 19th, 2002, I was placed into the hands of my adoptive parents. Being only about 9 months old, I finally had a forever-family.

I never knew my biological family or my real birthdate growing up. I was found on the steps of a hospital in Gaozhou City, China on September 5,

2001, and was then taken to an orphanage. I was assigned September 4th as my birthday. Now I celebrate September 4th as my official birthday.

June 19th is the day that my adoptive parents got to physically hold me for the first time. They had flown from the United States to Hong Kong and then traveled by bus with other families to Guangzhou, in Guangdong Province. It was here that my parents and 12 other families were crowded into a small room to wait for the little girls and babies to arrive. The American moms were given a number to pin onto their clothing. We orphans also had a matching number attached. One by one, numbers were called. My mom held me first and then my dad. This day we celebrate as my “Gotcha Day” because my parents finally got to hold me and I was now their baby girl.

After meetings, medical exams, and lots of sightseeing, we flew to the United States, arriving on June 28th. We celebrate this day as the day I got to really become part of my whole family. I have two brothers, 7 cousins, and of course my grandparents. While most kids just get to have one birthday each year, I get to celebrate three. It doesn't matter that I don't know my real birthday; each of the dates hold a special meaning for me!

While in China, my parents have told me that many strangers would stop them on the streets and say in

English, “Lucky baby!” They probably knew what fate I would endure if I stayed in China, growing up in an orphanage. I do feel lucky because I believe that my life would have been very different if I hadn't been adopted. I am now almost 18 years old and will be attending college next year. I have been given an education, proper health care, opportunities to expand my interests and grow in my abilities. I have a family that I know love me no matter what.

I have wondered why my biological parents [put me in the orphanage], or possibly even abandoned me. My mom likes to believe that my Chinese mother laid me down carefully on those hospital steps back in 2001, but who knows. I could have actually been abandoned in a bus station or in a park. Maybe I was in a box, maybe a bag. Someone else may have found me and taken me to those hospital steps. We have no information about my biological family. In all honesty, it hurts! But, what I do know is that the parents that have adopted me are MY parents and I have a family. It doesn't matter that we may look different. A family is not made from blood, but made from love.

In an ancient East Asian myth, there is something called the Red Thread of Fate. According to legend, a red thread is tied around an ankle or a finger upon someone's birth.

“An invisible red thread connects those who are destined to meet, regardless of time, place or circumstance. The thread may stretch or tangle, but never break.”



By just considering adoption, know that you have taken the first steps in making a decision that will positively affect your life and more importantly the life of a child. A red thread has been tied to you, and if you follow it, you will be led to a miracle at the other end.

If you are an AFTH adoptee (domestic or international) and want to share your story, email KristyG@afth.org.

November 18, 2019

Dear Adoptions From The Heart,

As I write this letter, I'm struggling to come up with the words that can express my gratitude for what the Birthparent Fund has done for me. **Life for me is a constant struggle**, which is why I chose to place my daughter in 2017. Since I have been involved with AFTH, I have felt nothing but love and support.

Facing eviction, I honestly had not where to turn. I have no family support, and I have limited friends. I had no idea what I was going to do. My situation is a daily struggle because I am on disability due to a catastrophic car accident. I get a monthly check that barely covers bills and food. I do my best each month to juggle and prioritize what bills I can pay. The situation began to get out of control when I had to help out a loved one and her child from losing heat and electric. Unfortunately, I was never paid back, and that began my spiral financially. I was trying my best to get caught up, but the late fees continued to pile up and it became impossible to pay. When I received the court eviction paperwork, I honestly had no clue or plan what to do, so I just sat down and cried.

Knowing I had no support in my life, I reached out to the only person who consistently, without judgment, always has my back...my caseworker, Amanda from Adoptions From The Heart. She has always been so supportive and has helped me in the past. I wasn't at all expecting anything as great as the entire balance of my rent to be paid. Amanda said, "let me work on it", and I knew she would try her best.

I am so overwhelmed with gratitude to AFTH and the Birthparent Fund. I can't really put it into words correctly. I hope this letter can give you a small idea of how grateful I am. This group, AFTH, continues to save my life and I will be forever in your debt. Thank you all again so much, for everything you do!

Love always,
A proud birth mom

(she asked for her name to be withheld but wanted her message of thanks to reach AFTH donors supporters)



Fall Festival Recaps

Allentown Office

This was our first year at Grim's and we really enjoyed it! It was a great fall day. Many adoptive families traveled to the farm to have visits with their children's birth parents. With over 20 attractions the kids were certainly busy. We would like to thank all the families who made the trip and we hope to see you all again very soon. Happy Holidays!

Central PA Office

The Central PA Regional Office held a Holiday Open House on November 19th at the Giant Community Center in Harrisburg. It was great to see all the families and more than thirty people were in attendance. The children had a great time playing with their toys and sticker books and families were able to enjoy a great reunion.

Cherry Hill Office

Our annual fall festival was held at Johnson's Corner Farm in Medford, NJ on Saturday, November 2nd. Many fall treats were on hand for the families including cider donuts, freshly picked apples, apple cider and barbecue potato chips graciously donated by Sprouts Farmer's Market in Marlton, NJ. The weather cooperated with sunny skies and a crisp autumn breeze which helped to make the day enjoyable for everyone who attended. Numerous adoptive and birth families held visits during the festival, which included live music and a craft fair, and they were able to visit the petting zoo, go to the playground and take a hayride on an actual working farm to pick broccoli and peanuts!

Virginia Office

We had our fall festival on November 2nd. The fun included a bounce house, music, barbecue, cornhole, and ladder golf! Over 60 people attended and we had four adoptive/birth family visits. Several birth parents from our support group attended as well even though they didn't have visits planned. It was great to catch up with AFTH clients who really enjoyed their day:

"We had such an excellent time at the fall festival. It was such a perfect thing for our first visit and my wife and I absolutely loved visiting with S's birth mom. At one moment S gave her a big hug and my heart almost melted."

"The weather could not have been more perfect. We enjoyed spending time with our daughter's birth mother, meeting other birth parents and seeing some of the adoptive parents we had met in class

Wynnewood Office

The fall festival was wonderful. We had multiple biological families come and visit with their son or daughter who they had placed for adoption. It was a wonderful time for all parties with lots of laughs, games, and hay rides! The fall festival was a wonderful time for all. We look forward to it again next year.







The Unknown Equation & Myth of an Average Wait Time

Waiting can often be the hardest part of the adoption process for prospective adoptive parents. It's full of lots of unknowns - when will I get the call, will it be 2 months or two years, will it be an emergency placement or will we be matched with an expecting mother who has 4 months left to go in her pregnancy?

Here's why there is **no such thing in regards to "an average" wait time in domestic adoption.** Comparing one family's wait to another is like comparing apples to, well, kiwis or grapefruit or pears or the dozens of other types of fruit. It just doesn't work because an average of all the waiting and placed families does not take into account all the individual differences in the situations we are seeing as well as in families' keys.

Think of it this way. It's like looking at a lock with a 4-digit code and thinking about all the different combinations that could make it work. That's 10,000 different possibilities. Even a 3-digit lock has upwards of 720 number combinations. Now think about your profile key and how many various ways you could have filled it out and imagine each box is a part of the code on the lock that holds the right situation for you.

Say we had 14 expecting parents choosing families this month. Each one of those situations is unique just as is your key. Not only does racial background and drug use play a role in including or excluding profiles to be shown but so does an expecting parent's preferences. Do they want someone to be at home first 3 months, do they have a religion preferences, are they open to singles and LGBTQ+ couples, how many visits do they want...each answer moves profiles in and out of the "to be shown list". No two birth parents are shown the exact same list of profiles because there is typically something different in each of their situation or requests.

It's not to say that seeing current waiting stats or reviewing situation reports at AFTH support groups aren't helpful. Those numbers can give you a general idea of where the majority of families currently find themselves in the wait. That's not to say it won't change

next month when we begin seeing different types of expecting parents situations. The situation list can be helpful to see trends that AFTH is currently seeing. Also, by reviewing the situation list, you can get a general count for the times you may have been shown in that given month. ***Keep in mind, there is another unknown...you don't know how many other families were also being shown for that situation.*** You could have been 1 in 6 or 1 in 95. Looking at the situations can also give you an idea of areas you might want to open yourself up to learn more about for examples drug use or mental illnesses.

Expecting parents chose families for a million different reasons. It could be as simple as a request to see the longest waiting families to something more personal such as sharing the same love of a sports team.

Don't be discouraged. Be genuine in your profile and on your key and the right match for you will come along and it will be worth the wait!

AFTH Staff News

We recently had several staff members celebrate milestone anniversaries at AFTH. We are so happy to have them a part of our team:

Jan Fox - over 20 years working off an on with AFTH
New Jersey Office Manager

Kristy Hartley-Galbraith - 15 years
Director of Marketing and Communications

Susan Myers - 5 years
District Supervisor of Connecticut

We are also welcoming some new staff members:
Bruno Gjata - Accountant in Wynnewood Office
Olivia Schneider - Office Manager in Allentown

and congrats to ***Jackie Lovell*** on being named Lead Social Worker in our Wynnewood Office

Share Your Heart Benefit Concert



Our 3rd Annual Share Your Heart Benefit Concert that was held at the Manayunk Brewing Company on Thursday, November 7th was a great success raising over \$2,900 for AFTH's Birth Parent Scholarship Fund. The Scholarships provide financial assistance to birth mothers and fathers who are furthering their education to make a better life for themselves. See [page 4](#) for Lucy's story, our Fall 2019 Scholarship winner's story.

More than 80 people joined us for the four-hour event kicking off National Adoption Month. The night was filled with live music, food, drinks, and celebration. This year's performers were Bethlehem & Sad Patrick, Miss Elaine, and Whiskey Logic.

Opening for the night was Bethlehem and Sad Patrick who were named Slingshot's 2019 Top10 Artists You Should Know From Philadelphia. Her soaring vocals and body percussion coupled with his talented guitar skills delivered powerful music about love, living in the city and struggling to make it in this world.

We were also joined by Miss Elaine, a drag artist in the greater Philadelphia area. She won Cycle 9 of Philly Drag Wars as well as Breakthrough Drag Artist of the year in 2018. Ms. Elaine had an amazing Philadelphia inspired act and engaged the crowd with her performance.

Our headlining band was Whiskey Logic. This local rock cover band played hits from the '60s to the '90s and got our crowd moving. Everyone enjoyed their music. They had people singing and dancing to their favorite songs.

The room was garnished in purple and teal decorations and there was no shortage of props for the photobooth where participants snapped fun photos with friends. The raffles were a huge hit and included autographed Beats Headphones, Flyers and Villanova football tickets, and 2 nights/3 days stay at a resort among other things.

The night would not have been a success without headlining sponsor, Cam Media Team. Rizzo is the founder and CEO of Cam Media and he is also a birth father who was in college when he placed his son for adoption making this event near and dear to him. He gave a moving speech that night sharing his story and underlining the importance of the Scholarship Fund and how it can help to propel birth parents to a better place. Participants were also able to see how their support directly impacted lives as quotes from past Scholarship winners adorned each table to highlight how even a little bit of help can go a long way.

Thank you to everyone who came out, we are already looking forward to next year. If you missed it, you can catch a glimpse of the night on our Facebook page.


Agency News

AFTH Holiday Closure

AFTH offices will be closed for the holidays starting at 4 pm on Friday, December 20th and re-opening on Thursday, January 2nd. Social workers will be available to hospitals for emergency placements during the break and will continue working with women who may deliver during that time.

Sending Gifts to AFTH for Birth Parents

Many families send gifts to our local offices for us to then forward along. Be sure to send your gifts early enough to reach the office. **All packages that arrive before December 15th will be mailed prior to the holiday.** Gifts received after that date are not guaranteed to ship before our holiday closing. We ask that families include money for postage to forward the gifts to their child's birth parents.



When sending gifts and updates to AFTH, please remember to include a note for internal use only that has your last name.

This speeds up the process for staff to correctly identify recipients.

If you birth parent's office is...

Pittsburgh, Lancaster, or Wynnewood, PA - mail to
30-31 Hampstead Circle, Wynnewood PA 18109

New York or Allentown - mail to
2212 Union Blvd, Allentown, PA 18109

New Jersey - mail to
451 Woodland Ave, Cherry Hill, NJ 08002

Virginia - mail to
1407 Stephanie Way, Suite H, Chesapeake, VA 23320

Connecticut - mail to
1 Regency Drive #108, Bloomfield, CT 06002

Delaware - mail to
18-A Trolley Square, Wilmington, DE 19806

Domestic Program Update

Just a reminder to families currently in our program. You will be receiving an updated Contract and Agency Policies in December through email. AFTH is currently accepting e-signature through Panda Doc. Our hope is to limit the amount of physical paperwork required and move towards an e-file approach. These important documents should be reviewed, signed, and returned as soon as possible. Families who are already placed but not finalized also must return the documents. The email will be sent by HeidiG@afth.org. Families who haven't returned the documents by December 20 will automatically put on hold.

Waiting for a placement during the holiday season can feel especially difficult. Each person copes in a different way. Your social worker is there to provide guidance and support, don't hesitate to reach out. Also take a look at AFTHTv's episode 4 of season 1 called "Coping with the Wait During the Holiday Season" as it may provide some additional tips.

*Dear Waiting Families,
You have had so many holidays surrounded by family and friends and their children, wishing for that to one day be you with your little ones.*

I know the holiday season can be especially hard as you wait for "the call" hoping that this is the year you will have your own bundle of joy to celebrate the season with.

Please know our social workers are here to lean on during the difficulties. And even though our offices are closed, our social workers are ready for calls from hospitals and expecting mothers.

Take this time to surround yourself with loved ones who will undoubtedly be there to celebrate with you when the exciting time arrives for YOU to introduce YOUR little one to your family.

Have a joyous holiday season.

Mafine Chalkey

What to Do For 2019 Taxes

Some families who adopted this past year may not be able to finalize before the end of the year. This means some children will not officially be issued a Social Security Number in time for tax season.

Here is what those families need to know come tax time: The IRS can issue families an Adoption Taxpayer Identification Number (ATIN), a temporary nine-digit number for a child who does not yet have a social

security number. ATIN are requested using form W-7A, at www.irs.gov. Documentation describing your child's placement will need to accompany the form. You may require a letter from an AFTH office confirming you're placement so please reach out to obtain this letter.

It can take up to eight weeks to receive an ATIN so families may want to start the process now. ATINs are valid for two years and can be used to claim dependency on tax documents.

Agency Waiting Statistics

As of November 1st, 73% of AFTH's waiting families have been waiting for 18 months or less and 54% a year or less. As of March 2019, we began limiting new adoptive parent applicants only to families who are open, at minimum, to placements with African-American children. As a result, social workers have had more profiles to show to African-American expecting parents. 86% of families open to African-American children are waiting 18 months or less, 65% a year or less and 33% 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.

Online AFTH Waiting Family Support Group

Adoption is a big, life-changing decision. The path to adoption can also be frustrating and exhausting as it can sometimes be a long process filled with periods of uncertainty and longing. It's always difficult to share the personal and intimate details of your life and your family's story. However, sharing with other people in the process may be crucial to help manage the wait as well as for others as they embark their own journeys. We have just launched a private Facebook group for AFTH Waiting Families. It will be moderated by AFTH social workers but will be an outlet to gain support and encouragement. You can contact your social worker for details or you can request to join the group here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/534198720480261>

AFTH Support Groups In-person & Online

Birth Parent Support Groups -

Many birth parents who have worked with AFTH have said that being a part of a support group helped tremendously with their grief and healing. Not only do we have a **private Facebook Birth Parent Support Group** but many offices also host in-person gatherings to connect birth parents together. Contact your social worker for details.

Waiting Family Support Groups - The wait can be difficult but finding support along the way can be helpful. Support groups are led by AFTH staff and cover a variety of topics designed for waiting families. Contact your office or visit our events calendar at www.afth.org for details.

Brooklyn, NY Support Group 2020 Dates

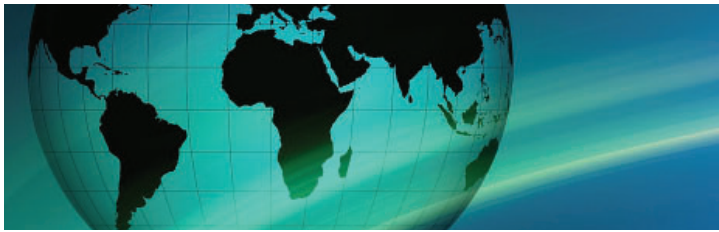
January 2, March 5, May 7, July 2, September 3, and November 5 from 6:00-8:00pm. For details, email Rebekah at rebekah.mcgee@gmail.com.

NEW

Online Waiting Family Support Group

Facebook support group moderated by AFTH social workers to help waiting families come together in support. Contact your social worker or request to join there: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/534198720480261>

International Adoption



While AFTH no longer provides international adoption programs, we do collaborate with agencies across the U.S. that provide inter-country adoption placement services. AFTH is able to provide Home Studies, Education, Post-Adoption/Placement Reports and Services, and other assistance in support of international adoptions. Email adoption@afth.org to see how we can help you, including referring you to one of these partner agencies.

Seeking International Adoptees Adopted Through AFTH to Share Their Stories

We are hoping to hear from AFTH international adoptees. We are hoping to highlight their stories in our blogs, newsletters and potentially on AFTHtv.

We want to elevate the voice of adoptees and their unique perspectives:

What was it like growing up?

What would you want younger children to know about navigating the world as an adoptee?

We welcome your unique story and all the joys and challenges along the way.

Are you wanting to connect with other adoptees?

We can do that too. Reach out to us so we can help make those connections.

We are eagerly waiting to hear from you. To share your story, email KristyG@afth.org.

Recent Legislation

Restoring the Adoption Tax Credit's Refundability

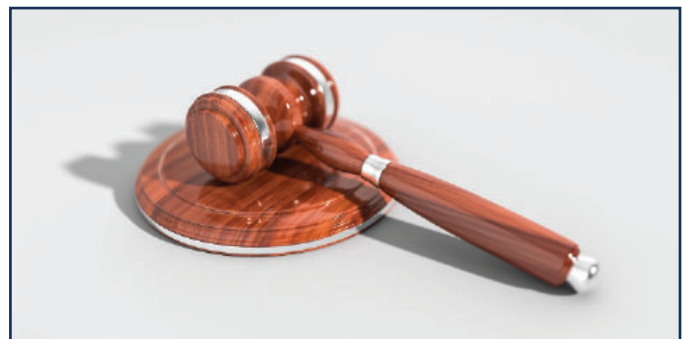
Over the summer, U.S. Senators and members of the House of Representative introduced the Adoption Tax Credit Refundability Act. This bipartisan bill would restore the refundability portion of the credit which would help many more families. In its current state, the majority of families who are adopting children only receive a portion of the credit as it is based on income and federal tax liability. In 2010 and 2011 tax years, the adoption tax credit was refundable which means a person could benefit from the credit regardless of their tax liability.

NY Law Give Adoptees Access to Original Birth Certificates

On November 14, 2019, New York joined 9 other states which have unsealed adoptee's birth records. Governor Andrew Cuomo signed legislation giving adults who were adopted in New York access to a certificated copy of their birth certificate.

Cuomo gave a statement explaining the importance of this legislation: "Every New Yorker deserves access to the same birth records -- it's a basic human right. For too many years, adoptees have been wrongly denied access to this information, and I am proud to sign this legislation into law and correct this inequity once and for all."

The new law takes affect January 15, 2020 however details of how adoptees can request access to these records are still being figured out.



Tips to Help During the Wait



Waiting can be hard, especially as a prospective adoptive parent during the holiday season. It's important to continue your life as much as possible while waiting. Self care is also important. Doing the things that you enjoy can help ease the wait.

Here are some other tips that may help:

1. Continue taking pictures and documenting your story. We encourage you to update your ParentFinder account with even more pictures and experiences. Staying active on a some-what regular basis can help increase your profile's exposure.
2. Consider doing some practical things such as updating your health insurance, finding out about your company's adoption leave policy, finding a pediatrician, take parenting classes and exploring child care options.
3. Read lots of adoption blogs, articles, books and podcasts. Remember, it's important to hear multiple perspectives, especially when it comes to parenting.
4. Attend a support group and expand your social network with other adoptive families.
5. Consider picking up an old hobby or doing something else rewarding, fun, or worthwhile to keep your spirits up. Things will change drastically when a child joins your family so now may be the perfect time to tackle a special project.

Congratulations to AFTH's Newest Families..

Daughters

Joshua & Justin
Allison
Matt & Ashley
Matthew & Jason
Joseph & Kristy
Ryan & Mitchell
Kevin & Cherie
Christos
Jeffrey & Sherry
Alan & Megan
Kent & Geneva
Michael & Lindsay
Todd & Danielle
Armstead & Lisa
James & Jeneen
Brandon & Mandy (*twins*)
Marci & Vorrice
Brett & Ashley
Kevin & Martell



Sons

Kevin & Colleen
Kathleen
Matthew & Leah
Robert & Benjamin
Sean & Amy
Shawn & Michelle
Kevin & Ashlee
John & Kari
Daniel & Victoria
Mark & Kristy
Ryan & Dmytro
Peter & Christine
Michael & Keri
Brian & Rebecca
Derek & Debra
Brandon & Mandy (*twins*)
Michael & Laura
Pasquale & Laura



*30-31 Hampstead Circle
Wynnewood, PA 19096*

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



AFTHtv Celebrates One Year

Adoptions From The Heart's online video series AFTHtv just celebrated its one year anniversary. It was launched on November 6, 2018 featuring staff, families, birth parents and adoptees as a way to share experiences. With over 45 episodes already aired, including "The Unheard Voices of Birth Mothers", the biggest impact has been reaching people who might never have otherwise understood the complexities of adoption. AFTHtv creates discussions and gives a platform to voices - like birth mothers and fathers - who might have otherwise never been heard. We are now entering Season 4. We hope to continue to break down barriers and create a broader awareness about the complexities of adoption. You can catch AFTHtv every Tuesday morning on AFTH's Facebook page and Youtube channel.



FREE ONLINE WEBINARS

*LEARN ABOUT AFTH'S PROGRAM
FROM THE COMFORT OF YOUR HOME*

DOMESTIC INFANT ADOPTION
JANUARY 15TH AT 7PM

Registration Required
www.afth.org